

WHISPERS AGAINST LABOUR'S WOMEN

What they're saying about
Short, Harman and Beckett.

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DARLING WALLIS: A KING'S FAVOURITE

Intimate pictures from the
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The ship that wouldn't come
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THE INDEPENDENT

Saturday 14 February 1998 70p No 3,534

Red card for 'worst judge in Britain'

by Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

He man voted the "worst judge in Britain" made legal history yesterday by resigning after a report concluded that his conduct had weakened "public confidence in the whole judicial process".

The decision by Sir Jeremih Harman, 67, to stand down from his £112,011 job as a High Court judge follows a controversial career, which has seen one of the judiciary's most senior members regularly criticised for being rude and a bully. Fifteen of his judgments are currently being challenged in the Court of Appeal.

It is believed to be the first time that a High Court judge, as resigned after criticism, and his departure, raises questions about who polices the 100 High Court judges. Only Parliament can sack a judge, although this power has never been used.

Three Court of Appeal judges yesterday published a damning report of Mr Justice Harman's treatment of a farmer bankrupted by a confidence trickster, who was kept waiting 20 months before judgment was given in his negligence action against accountants.

Some lawyers were so concerned at the amount of time the judge was ruminating on the case that they contemplated taking out an insurance policy in case he died.

Mr Justice Harman contested the Lord Chancellor after hearing his fellow judges' scathing comments and told him his intention to resign from the bench. Lord Irvine accepted resignation and a statement from the Lord Chancellor's Department said he was "genuinely concerned" about the lengthy delays in giving judgment. He added that he had

noted the comments of the appeal judges and "shares their concerns".

Lords Justice Peter Gibson, Brooke and Mummery ordered a retrial of the farmer Rex Goose's case after hearing that Mr Justice Harman had forgotten large parts of the essential facts and evidence in the case by the time he came to give judgment. They accused him of making incorrect statements and mistakes in the judgment.

The case began on 7 June 1994 and legal argument ended on 13 July. It was then that the wait for judgment - one of the longest on record - began.

When he finally delivered his decision, Mr Goose, a farmer of Spalding, Lincolnshire, had claimed damages

arising from allegations that accountants involved in the purchase of farm property in France had been in breach of their duty of care for ownership of property and had acted deceitfully.

Lord Justice Peter Gibson said in his judgment yesterday: "The court is driven to take this exceptional course [a retrial] on the ground that a substantial miscarriage of justice would be occasioned to Mr Goose by allowing the judge's decision to stand."

He added: "Conduct like this weakens public confidence in the whole judicial process. Left unchecked it would be ultimately subversive of the rule of law. Delays on this scale cannot and will not be tolerated. A situation like this must never occur again."

The resignation ends a 16-year career as a High Court judge, in which Mr Justice Harman gained notoriety for his ignorance of the wider world. He famously claimed to be unaware of the existence of Paul Gascoigne, Bruce Springsteen and Oasis. And he once told a woman witness who wanted to be referred to as Ms: "I've always thought there were only three kinds of women: wives, whores and mistresses."

Legal Business, the magazine which carried out the poll in which he was voted the profession's least favourite judge in three separate years, also dubbed him "dreadfully rude, discourteous, bullying... very unpredictable and nasty", although it noted his intellectual capacity. The magazine's deputy editor, Sarah Marks, said Mr Justice Harman was not the only case of a poor judge. She said: "Bad teachers can be sacked and bad doctors struck off. But judges seem to go on for ever and ever."

Horrible Harman, page 3

The world according to Mr Justice Harman

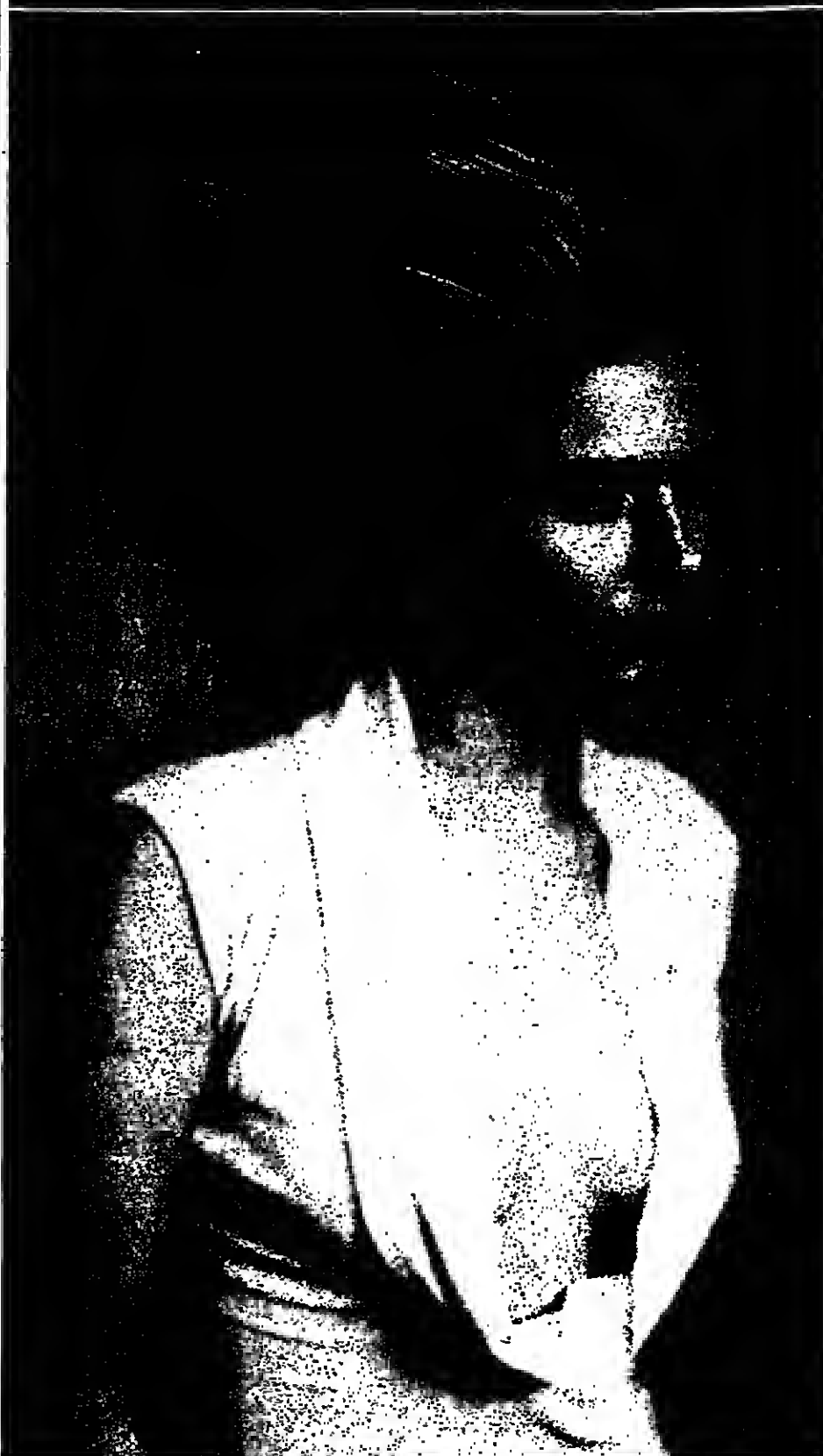


"Who is Gazza? Isn't there an operetta called *La Gazza Ladra*?"

"I've always thought there were only three kinds of women: wives, whores and mistresses."

On Oasis: "I certainly have not heard of the band."

Winners for pictures... and words



The Independent has received more commendations than any other national newspaper in this year's Nikon Press Awards, the most prestigious photographic competition in Britain. The judges commended six Independent photographers across four categories: features, fashion, sport and press photography of the year. Sheridan Morley

won the fashion award with this shot. In the World Press Awards, announced yesterday, the Independent on Sunday won the award for best arts picture. The prize capped a triumphant 24 hours for the Independent on Sunday which on Thursday was named Environmental Newspaper of the Year in the British Environmental and Media Awards. Further images, page 14

Pro-lifers put stop to the abortion pill

By John Lichfield
and Jeremy Laurence

PRODUCTION of the abortion pill, mifepristone, used by thousands of women in Britain, has been suspended and existing supplies will last only until the end of the year.

The pill, which also has potential as a contraceptive and as a possible treatment for breast cancer, has fallen victim to opposition from pro-life groups which believed, wrongly, that it opened the way for do-it-yourself abortions.

Hoechst, the giant German pharmaceutical company, ordered a French subsidiary to halt manufacture last year, partly as a result of threats by anti-abortion groups to boycott its other products. Sensitivity over the drug restricted promotion which in turn damaged profits. However, it emerged yesterday that the president of Hoechst, Wolfgang Hilger, is himself an opponent of abortion and had worries about the ethics of the drug.

Hoechst has transferred the patent rights to Dr Edouard Sakiz who was a member of the team which discovered the drug in 1982. He hopes to reach agreements with a number of small companies to resume production but several large companies have already turned him down because they do not wish to become a target for the pro-life lobby.

Dr Sakiz, who has formed a new company, Exelgyn, specifically to market mifepristone, formerly known as RU 486, told

the French newspaper *Libération* yesterday that existing stocks for Britain, Sweden and France - the only European countries which authorise the use of the drug - will run out next winter. However, a spokeswoman for Exelgyn in the UK claimed a deal with a manufacturer had now been done and production was expected to resume in the autumn.

The pill has been a constant target of anti-abortion groups. Although it is legal in the US, it is not on sale there. The result is that it has never attained widespread use, despite its impressive potential. Part of the reason is that people thought that swallowing a pill opened the way to simple, do-it-yourself abortions at home. In fact, mifepristone takes four to six hours to work and can only be taken under medical supervision in an abortion clinic, in case of side effects.

In 1996, it was used in 9,715 abortions in the UK, less than 6 per cent of the total. Surveys show up to a third of women would choose the drug if offered it but it has never been widely promoted.

Mifepristone is also being researched as an emergency contraceptive, as a male contraceptive, and as a treatment for breast cancer and the bowel condition Crohn's disease.



Clinton under pressure to delay Iraq strike

John Carlin
Washington

As the US Congress divided over military action against Iraq, the American public unopposed and the military unopposed, the White House under pressure yesterday to an aerial strike and reliable efforts to find a diplomatic solution to the impasse with President Saddam Hussein. Washington's hopes in-

creasingly rest on a mission to Baghdad by the UN Secretary-General, Kofi Annan.

Officials in Washington, London, Paris and Moscow, as well as their representatives in the UN Security Council, were in urgent and constant communication yesterday, struggling to come up with a mandate for Mr Annan on which they could all agree.

While sources close to the negotiations in Washington said

it was likely that Mr Annan would travel to Baghdad, alternative diplomatic routes having all but reached a dead end, such a mission was not perceived to be risk-free.

Mr Annan could achieve a breakthrough; he could return to New York empty-handed; but the worst outcome, according to the sources, would be for him to reach an agreement with President Saddam that would be unacceptable to

Britain and America. In such an event the divisions within the UN would become wider and more acrimonious.

"If the Secretary-General goes to Baghdad," said a source, "he must do so with a mandate constrained by the sharp red lines set down by those parties with forces on the ground."

Yet those in the US camp who are drawing the red lines acknowledge that the gap is

wide between the political objectives sought by Washington and London and the military possibilities on the ground.

A US officer quoted in the *New York Times* said he doubted any air plan that would consist of just "putting holes in the desert". Far worse, other officers said, was the prospect of putting holes in Iraqi women and children. The mood in the US Congress, meanwhile, is hesitant. While the leaders of

the two main parties state their support for the President, the rank and file, responding to the mood among a sceptical electorate, refused unanimously to support a resolution backing the use of force against Iraq.

Curt Weldon, a Republican on the House of Representatives National Security Committee, spoke for many colleagues when he said: "Joe Six-pack is not convinced about what we're doing over there."

Today's news

Heat records melt

TOP temperature of 19.6C yesterday the hottest on record. Paris, Britain were warmer than south of France. Page 3

Uster wrangle

The Uster peace process deteriorated into a dispute over whether the IRA carried out the killings and whether Sinn Féin should be thrown out of talks. Page 2

It's time to massacre St Valentine's Day

By Steve Boggan

When, in AD240, they clubbed Valentine to death, they knew what they were doing. The only problem was, they then went and made him a saint and named a day in his honour.

As a result, people who don't love each other are forced to buy flowers they can't afford, eat at expensive restaurants with lots of other couples who can't stop pawing each other and send expensive cards bearing untrue greetings.

Today is St Valentine's Day. It is also National Impotence Day and falls at the

end of National Marriage Week. Inevitably, it provides the excuse for a thousand surveys which turn up "findings" on love, marriage and romance.

Did you know we will spend £22m on flowers today? (Flowers and Plants Association). Or that almost 25 per cent of marriage proposals are made in bed? (Definitive Guides). Or that Arsenal supporters are more likely to receive a Valentine's Day card than any other team's fans? (The Royal Mail). Or that men are more likely to be given a power drill or DIY tool than a romantic present? (Variety Club Gold Heart Appeal).

Valentine's Day is more and more commercialised, with special pressures being brought to bear on men, in particular, to be seen to be romantic.

Fantastic then, given that failure to gain an erection is often brought on by pressure, that St Valentine's Day has been chosen as National Impotence Day. The Impotence Association has given way to the inevitable and adopted 14 February after a private clinic named the day and was bombarded by the media, which found the timing irresistible. "It attracted a lot of attention, so we endorsed it this year," said Ann Craig, the

association's director. "We're bringing in extra staff for our helpline to handle the extra calls. We don't mind marking St Valentine's Day if it helps."

For men with no such problems, romance comes with mountains of bouquets, bunches and blooms including 7 million roses. But odds are they won't be English roses. Because of the St Valentine's demand for them, nearly all are imported, so those you give to your lover were probably grown in Colombia, India, Israel, Kenya or Zimbabwe.

The Impotence Association helpline number is 0181 767 7791.



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هكذا من الادل

Records melted by February heatwave

By Kate Watson-Smyth

IN MANY parts of Britain, yesterday was the hottest February day since records began. Temperatures soared to 19.1C in London and Barbourne, Worcestershire, recorded the hottest February day ever, with 19.6C registered at 3pm, beating southern France which reached a high of 18C.

It was the same over most of the country as Edinburgh, Glasgow and Birmingham all broke their records for the time of year with temperatures around 16C. The average temperature in February is around 6C.

In Blackpool, ice-cream vans cruised the promenade as children built sandcastles on the beach which was crowded with sunbathers.

At Chester Zoo, an extra admission gate had to be opened to cope with the hordes of people taking advantage of the unseasonal weather.

Chris Vere, a spokesman for the zoo, said: "The lovely weather has made the little animals a lot livelier, the lion cubs are dashing around playing and our baby Indian elephant Sithani has been out with her mmm."

"The weather seems to have brought around 1,000 extra people through the gate today."

Around the East Anglian coast, sun-lovers paddled in the sea and lounged on the beach. "There have been people paddling, playing on the beach or just sitting on the sand or the sea wall," said a spokeswoman for the tourist information centre in Lowestoft, Suffolk. "The town has been busy all day with peo-

ple in short sleeves and one or two in shorts. It's been like a warm spring day."

A spokeswoman for the tourist information centre in King's Lynn, Norfolk, said: "We noticed that all our museums have been very quiet. It's because everyone has headed for the coast at Hunstanton."

The previous record high temperature in Britain during February was at Milford Haven in 1972 which notched up 19.4 degrees.

A spokesman from the Meteorological Office said: "The unusually warm weather is due to warm air coming from north Africa bringing unseasonably high temperatures around 10 degrees higher than normal for this time of year."

The unseasonal weather is expected to continue for the next few days although it will be slightly cooler.

"We are not expecting the temperatures to remain quite as high as they are at the moment but it is certainly not going to start freezing," he said.

But the warm weather has caused problems in some Scottish ski resorts where the mild temperatures have caused the snow to melt.

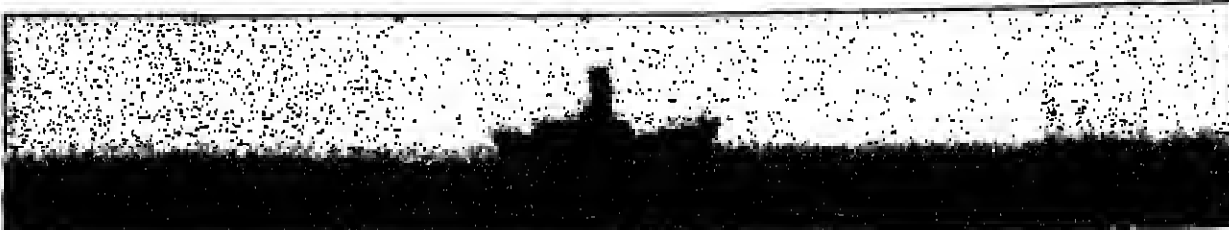
At the Nevis Range ski resort, the highest in the country at 4006ft, there is snow on the higher slopes but visitors were being advised to bring their walking boots as well as ski gear.

Cally Fleming, marketing manager at the range, said: "We are beginning to worry about [the lack of snow] but we often get a large fall in March and April so we are hopeful that it will not be a totally bad season."



The ghost ship that refused to come back from the dead

Kathy Marks looks into the twilight zone of the Goodwins



Watching brief: Two of the ghost hunters search the seas, above, for the 'Lady Lovibund'. Glimpsed through the mist... the Goodwin Sands lighthouse. Photograph: Tom Pilston

The Goodwin Sands, three miles off the Kent coast, are a treacherous spot for seafarers. Thousands of ships have been wrecked there over the centuries, many of them sinking without trace, ground to dust by the abrasive sands. Locals call them the Great Swallowers.

The sands, often shrouded in mist, have spawned dozens of legends, none more enduring than that of the *Lady Lovibund*, a three-masted barque that foundered there on 13 February, 1748, and is said to reappear in spectral form every 50 years.

And so it was that yesterday, on the ship's 250th anniversary, hotels and boarding houses in Deal were booked solid with ghost-hunters from as far afield as America, Italy and Germany. Thirteen of them managed to secure places

on a fishing boat that left Ramsgate at first light on Friday the 13th, following the same fateful route as the *Lady Lovibund*. Andrew Tarbuck, 26, telesales worker from Newcastle, circled the date in his diary two years ago. "I read this story when I was a child, and I've been fascinated by it ever since," he said.

According to the version related by George Goldsmith-

Carter, a former lightship crewman, in his 1953 book, *The Goodwin Sands*, the *Lovibund* was sent to its watery grave by John Rivers, the first mate, as it set sail for Oporto. The ship's master, Simon Reed, had just got married, unaware that Rivers, his best man, was consumed by unrequited passion for his own wife. As they approached the sands, Goldsmith-

Carter wrote, Rivers delivered a "crushing blow" to Reed's skull, then took the helm.

In the cabin below, the wedding party was too preoccupied by the festivities to notice the change of course. When the ship crashed into the Goodwins, they were trapped. The *Lovibund* went down with the loss of all hands.

Aboard the 38-ft *Bonaventure*, skippered by Allan Booth, expectations were high yes-

terday, but no ghostly vessel materialised.

David Collier, a local historian, believes that the legend has prosaic origins. "The mid-18th century was the height of the Deal smugglers," he said. "How better to keep people away from your nefarious activities... than to invent a ghost story? We are not talking about spirits of the ethereal kind, but the ones found in bottles."

Few regrets over departure of 'Harman the Horrible'

By Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

KNOWN by his victims as "Harman the Horrible", Mr Justice Harman - who resigned yesterday after unprecedented criticism from fellow judges - is unlikely to be missed.

For the past 16 years, Sir Jeremiah Harman, 67, a senior High Court judge, has been acquiring a reputation as a hectoring hully with little interest in the outside world. News yesterday that he was resigning after a damning report into his handling of a damages case, in which the claimants were kept waiting for 20 months for a de-

cision, was greeted with relief by many lawyers. Three Court of Appeal judges were critical of conduct which "weakens public confidence in the whole judicial process".

His unpopularity was reflected in being voted as one of the worst judges on the High Court bench in all three surveys of 100 solicitors and barristers by *Legal Business* magazine. One interviewee said: "He has reached unparalleled depths of awfulness. It is nothing short of an uncomfortable adventure to appear before him, and in terms of delivering justice he is nowhere. He is impolite. He is the judge I least want to appear in front of."

He gained public attention for a coun-

WHAT FELLOW LAWYERS SAID ABOUT HIM

Anonymous lawyers to *Legal Business* magazine: "Good riddance to bad rubbish."

And "He has reached unparalleled depths of awfulness."

Judgment in the Court of Appeal: His

conduct "weakens public confidence in the whole judicial process".

Male barrister speaking in his support: "I deplore this tendency towards uniformity - there must be room for mavericks."

ber of high-profile gaffes. When the former guards officer was asked if he had heard of the rock group Oasis during a 1996 court hearing, he replied: "I certainly

have not heard of the band, I don't listen to bands." At a hearing during the height of World Cup fever in 1990 when asked to grant an injunction halting an unauthorised

biography of Paul Gascoigne, he said: "Is he a rugby or association footballer? Isn't there an opera called *La Gazza Ladra*?"

In 1992, he earned the nickname "the Kicking Judge" after he booted a taxi driver outside his London home under the mistaken impression he was a press photographer.

But it is his treatment of other lawyers that has gained him the greatest notoriety. One said he was "dreadfully rude to people who are junior and inexperienced; discourteous and bullying".

His latest targets have been the new solicitor advocates who have rights of audience in certain cases. The first one to appear

before the judge was asked to provide a copy of his practising certificate after the judge inquired loftily: "Who are you?"

He was called to the Bar in 1954 and graduated to the bench along the time-honoured route of Eton, the Coldstream Guards and Lincoln's Inn.

His resignation brought a mixed response from members of the Bar at the High Court yesterday. One woman barrister said: "Good riddance to bad rubbish." But a male colleague countered: "I deplore this tendency towards uniformity. There must be room for mavericks, even on the bench. If they stick to being rude and irascible but efficient at the same time, it's all right."

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Father hopes photofit will trap girl's killer

By Jason Bennetto
Crime Correspondent

A PHOTOFIT picture of a man suspected of killing Caroline Dickinson, the teenager who was raped in a French hostel, was released yesterday in Brittany - 19 months after the murder.

Caroline's father, John, who has been highly critical of the police operation, said that he believed that his daughter's killer was still in the area.

Caroline, 13, was raped and murdered in a tiny shared hostel dormitory in Pleine Fougères, Brittany, while on a trip with Launceston Community College from Cornwall.

The photo image was compiled with the help of some of Caroline's fellow pupils when French detectives visited Launceston earlier this month. The pupils and a teacher are believed to have spotted a man acting suspiciously around the French hostel.

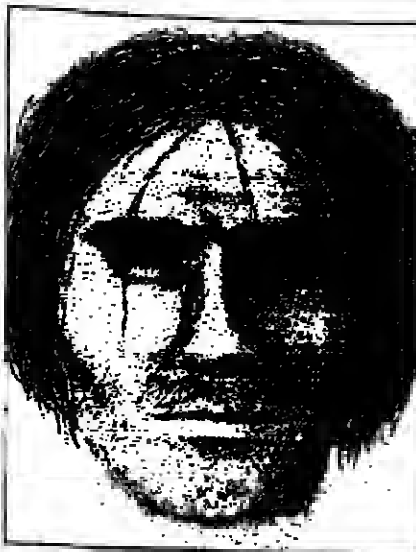
Mr Dickinson, 41, from Bodmin, Cornwall, made his eighth trip to France to attend the police news conference, where the photofit was released.

He said he believed Caroline's killer was "still in the region and keeping low, because until now no one has known what he looked like, and he has felt able to relax himself".

"But he is going to be found out soon because people will recognise this photofit. I am very, very confident about it," Mr Dickinson added.

The photofit was "the sort of face that I am sure will have stuck in people's minds, even though he may have changed his looks from that time", he said.

Mr Dickinson made a personal appeal



The suspect's photo image was released by police in Brittany

to the French public for information, and asked them to look "long and hard" at the photofit and come forward if they recognised the man. He dismissed "negative comments" that there was little chance of finding the culprit - even with a photofit.

"That is not my personal feeling. I think it is a very important new development, and I am sure people will have their memories jogged and come forward," he said.

"It could have been anybody's daughter," said Mr Dickinson, who felt the net was "drawing in" in the search for the killer.

The photofit will be distributed to police stations, petrol stations and post offices across France.

Earlier this week it emerged that the cotton wool gag used to smother Caroline

came from another hostel 25 miles away - where another British schoolgirl from Salford, Greater Manchester, was attacked earlier that night in July 1996.

But the vital link was only made when the investigation was last year handed over to Judge Renaud van Ruymbekke, who replaced Gerard Zaig, the original investigating magistrate, after criticism from the Dickinson family.

The "intimate knowledge" of the two hostels and possible earlier intrusions at other hostels pointed to someone from the Brittany area being the culprit, said Mr Dickinson.

He claimed that the cotton wool was one factor linking the two attacks and the previous failure to establish that showed Mr Zaig to be "incompetent".

Meanwhile, Mr Dickinson's MP, Paul Tyler, the Liberal Democrat for North Cornwall, renewed a plea to the Foreign Office for both the British and the French authorities to learn the lessons of the murder.

Both he and the Dickinson family urged the need for Europe-wide standard security arrangements in all hostels for young people, and pointed out weaknesses in the translation arrangements, and the extra difficulties caused by the different police and judicial systems.

Delays, an information blackout, "casual incompetence and a cavalier attitude were the hallmark of the initial investigation," said Mr Tyler.

"Evidence which should have been pursued vigorously in the first 18 days has remained unchecked for 18 months," he added.

هكذا من الأصل



Caroline Dickinson was raped and murdered in a French hostel in 1996

'All-out ban on boxing' if a woman died in ring

By Barrie Clement
Labour Editor

The whole sport of boxing might be banned if a female fighter died in the ring, the sport's senior medical adviser said yesterday. Defending the professional boxing authority's refusal to grant Jane Couch a licence, Dr Adrian Whiteson told an industrial tribunal there was no evidence to show women's boxing was safe.

Ms Couch, who became world welterweight champion last year, is accusing the British Board of Boxing Control of sexual discrimination by stopping her earning her living as a professional fighter in her home country. Her fight is being backed by the Equal Opportunities Commission.

Dr Whiteson told the tribunal in Croydon, south London, that he had no objection to women boxing and saw no reason why they should not establish their own professional authority with its own medical advisers.

"However, boxing as we know it is a high-risk sport which can cause injury and death. Should such a tragedy occur when a woman is boxing, I believe the public adversity would put the whole sport at risk."

Earlier the tribunal heard Dr Whiteson say he considered women in general "too frail" to box because they bruised easily and became emotionally unstable and more accident-prone during menstruation. Another argument by the council is that women might unintentionally box during early stages of pregnancy. Attention is also drawn to some medical opinion which contends that repeated blows to the breast can cause lumps which may turn malignant.

Dr Whiteson, who has 35 years' experience in the sport, confirmed that women were not considered individually by the council; they were banned as a gender.

"We have no evidence to show that women's boxing is safe. We have a totally open mind, but there are doubts and I have to defend the sport of boxing to my peers and to the press."

Ms Couch, 29, known as the "Fleetwood Assassin", was told by Dr Whiteson that she might thank him in the long run. "It is possible that if research proves increased risk to women, we may have done the applicant a great favour." The 10-stone 5ft 7 in boxer took up the sport three years ago after seeing a television documentary about female fighters. She won her world crown in Copenhagen last May by defeating reigning champion Sandra Geiger. John Warren, chairman of the tribunal, later reserved judgment.

National Park orders company to stop quarrying in Peaks

NATIONAL PARK officials yesterday ordered a halt to quarrying in a top beauty spot. The move followed a meeting of the Peak District National Park Authority into a proposal from RMC Roadstone to extract a million tons a year of limestone from Backdale Quarry at Longstone Edge, near Bakewell, in Derbyshire.

RMC already has permission to take fluorspar in the area. However, it had also been taking limestone - in breach of its planning permission - and has been served with an enforcement notice.

Local residents and countryside campaigners welcomed the decision. Peter Thompson, chairman of the Save Longstone

Edge group, said: "We applaud the decision by the park authority in stopping the expansion of this massively destructive quarry. The decision means that even if the company appeals, they are prevented from further damaging the landscape during the lengthy appeals procedure... They should accept the decision gracefully and pull out from Longstone Edge."

Elaine Gilligan, quarrying campaigner at Friends of the Earth, welcomed the decision but said: "The Government must change the law to allow the old minerals permissions in environmentally important areas to be revoked without local authorities having to pay huge sums in compensation."

The issue is seen as a test case by 11 national parks in England and Wales which face more than 100 similar proposals.

RMC which owns the site, said that it would appeal to the Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott.

Lawyers for the National Park believe an inquiry could take up to eight months, with no guarantee that it would win. If Mr Prescott ruled in favour of the company, the planning board would have to compensate it for lost mining during that time.

Martin Doughty, a councillor and chairman of the National Park Authority, said: "This has been a very difficult decision. There is no question that we are required

to protect the environment but, because of the complexities of the law and the interpretation of old planning permissions, this is easier said than done. We have had to prepare our case very carefully because we know any enforcement orders may be challenged by RMC. By issuing a stop notice, we could be liable for compensation."

The authority has already written to RMC warning them of its intention to issue the enforcement and stop notices. It will now explain in detail why it has rejected the company's proposals and put forward an alternative scheme for restoring the site.

Mr Doughty said: "RMC say they are concerned about the environment but, given

the local and national outrage their actions have provoked, we hope they will accept that the original planning permission did not allow for the kind of extraction they are proposing."

David Bradley, of the Council for the Protection of Rural England, said: "We applaud this decisive action to protect the National Park. Last year we asked the Peak Park Authority to issue an enforcement notice to control the work. It seemed clear then that the existing planning consent only covered vein minerals - not limestone extraction."

He added that without the park authority's move, Backdale would have become "the biggest eyesore in the Peak District".

SMALL CHANGE



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Whispering plot smears female ministers

By Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

A SERIES of whispering campaigns against female Cabinet ministers appeared to be under way last night, with Clare Short, Harriet Harman, Margaret Beckett and even Mo Mowlam suffering from smears.

Although a number of male Cabinet members have also been fingered, attacks on these four have often been of a particularly personal nature.

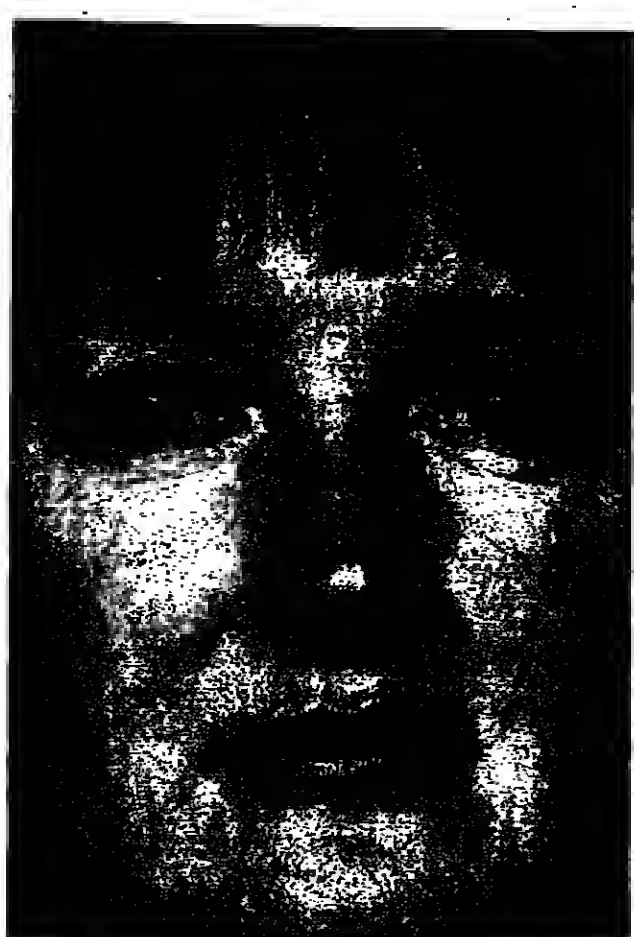
The revelation comes after comments by Clare Short, the International Development Secretary, to a documentary crew that another member of the Cabinet had lied to a newspaper over remarks she made about parades in Northern Ireland. On the same day there were renewed rumours that Harriet Harman, the Social Security Secretary, was about to be sacked because other ministers have lost confidence in her.

The Northern Ireland Secretary, Mo Mowlam, faced whispered claims, apparently from figures in the Unionist camp, that she was not up to her job because of her illness last year. And last week Conservatives were saying they had learned Margaret Beckett might be moved from the Department of Trade and Industry because she was felt to be incompetent.

Such rumours are part of the currency of Westminster life, and male ministers including



Clare Short: 'Outspoken nature makes her a natural target'



Harriet Harman: 'Rumours that she is about to be sacked'



Margaret Beckett: 'Tories heard she was felt to be incompetent'

Gavin Strang, the Transport Minister, and David Clark, the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster, have also had to cope with them.

But friends of the women in

the Cabinet suggested some of them were targeted because of their more "human" political styles. One such source said: "Women tend to deal with more human issues and they

speak in a far more personal way, whereas men deal in theories and practical types of issues. That can leave women open to greater criticism, because they are dealing with

emotions quite often. "Women are often criticised for things men are never criticised for, the way they look or their relationships." A friend of Clare Short said she had been con-

gratulated by some of her colleagues for her outspoken response to these campaigns, which had dogged her since long before she joined the Cabinet. "If she's being undermined

she won't sit there and take it. People know they may well get fingered if they have a go at her." Yesterday a Downing Street spokesman defended Ms Harman after two newspapers

suggested she was about to be sacked. "The person who knows when there might be a reshuffle is the Prime Minister."

"The Prime Minister believes Harriet Harman is doing a difficult job and doing it well, and he has said that on occasion," he said. Such stories tended to pop up on quiet news days, he added.

Yesterday's *Daily Express* pointed to tension between Tony Blair and Gordon Brown as a possible reason some of last week's rumours.

Ms Harman was appointed on Mr Brown's advice, it said, and Mrs Beckett was also seen as an ally of the Chancellor.

While Ms Short's outspoken nature often makes her a target, attacks on Ms Mowlam are more likely to be a result of the oghthrope she is forced to walk to keep the Northern Ireland peace talks together.

She has been the subject of bitter attacks by Unionists, and there have been tales circulating that she might be given an alternative role in co-ordinating the party message.

However, these stories have been denied by government sources who have said her work in Northern Ireland has been too important and too successful for her to be moved.

Mr Clark and Mr Strang have both been mooted as possible casualties in a summer reshuffle. Mr Clark has complained publicly about smears, though Mr Strang has remained silent.

Tories spent more than £20m in run-up to the election

By Fran Abrams

CONSERVATIVE spending in the run-up to the general election was more than £28m, it was revealed last night, including almost £10m in the last month.

But record donations of £38m meant the party ended the 1996-7 financial year in the black. Despite election spending well in advance of Labour, which managed £27m over the two and a half years leading to 1 May last year, the Tories had a £7m surplus in March, 1997.

The party's annual report and accounts, published last night, does not give any list of its donors, large or small. Lord Parkinson, the party chairman, said that even by the end of the election campaign it had just about managed to break even. It would be "to some extent an intrusion" if political parties had their national spending on elec-

tions limited, he added. The Central Office accounts revealed the party had a "record surplus" of £7.4m at the end of the party's financial year which closed on 31 March, just before the final weeks of the election.

But Lord Parkinson said, if the accounts had run to 1 May itself, "the picture would have been totally different. In the next six weeks, that cash disappeared. Six weeks to the general election had consumed most of our cash. In the course of the six weeks after this, a further £10m was spent, which brought the cost of the general election to £28.3m," he said. He predicted Labour would announce it had spent "something like £25m".

He also confirmed the Tories' total election bill included paying £13m to the advertising company M & C Saatchi.

Given the result on 1 May and Labour's crushing election victory, Lord Parkinson joked: "I think M & C Saatchi had a good election."

Labour last night responded to the Tory accounts by calling for the party to say how it managed to find so much money to fight the election campaign. A senior Labour spokesman said: "Two years before the election, the Tories had a debt of nearly £20m. Now they tell us that in the run-up to the election, they spent £28m. So where did they get the £48m from? That is a monumental sum. They clearly have something very serious to hide."

Labour publishes details of its major donors, and the Liberal Democrats have announced plans to do so.

Lord Neil is looking at the issue as part of a review of party funding.

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Council to fund gifted pupils in private education

By Matt Rodda

A CONSERVATIVE education authority is planning to fund a number of pupils at independent schools despite the scrapping of the nation-wide assisted places scheme by the Government.

Surrey County Council's education committee has drawn up the scheme to help about 100 gifted pupils go to independent secondary schools from September.

A further 1,000 pupils would remain in state schools but attend master classes in particular subjects run by teachers from independent schools.

Doug McAvoy, general secretary of the National Union of Teachers, called on David Blunkett, the Secretary of State for Education, to legislate to block the plan. The move follows the Government scrapping the Assisted Places Scheme run by the Conservative administration which helped 38,000 pupils a year.

Money from the scheme is to pay for class sizes in primary schools to be kept under a maximum of 30 children.

On Thursday, the Government announced the areas where the first £22m would be spent. It has also called on independent schools to share facilities with the state sector to increase opportunities for all pupils.

Under the Surrey scheme the council would pay independent schools the £1,700 per head that it would normally spend on sending the pupils to state secondary school. The rest of the cost of educating them would be covered by a trust and parental contributions based on family income.

Families would be assessed by a means test and the scheme would only be available to parents with a joint income of under about £30,000 a year. The trust would be set up with an initial £50,000 from the council, and contributions from parents and business.

Dr Andrew Povey, chair-

man of Surrey education committee, said he did not know why Mr McAvoy wanted "to remove choice" from parents.

"This is a very exciting scheme which will benefit many children. It is designed to follow on and improve on the assisted places scheme. We hope reciprocal links will also benefit teachers from both sectors," Dr Povey said.

He added: "I think parents will really go for this scheme. 20 per cent of children in Surrey go to independent schools. There would be a reaction in Surrey if the Government stopped the council."

Dr Povey said that subjects where master classes would be held could include those like Japanese that were not normally provided in state schools. He hoped that 14 independent schools would be able to initially participate in the scheme.

However, Mr McAvoy said the council was taking public money out of state schools, and called for a "loophole in the law" to be closed. "I am sure the majority of parents would want to see every penny raised through their rates spent in their local schools, not subsidising some children to attend private schools."

The union had discussed the issue with Mr Blunkett and Mr McAvoy called on him to legislate to "prevent this re-creation of the Assisted Places Scheme by other means."

Mr Blunkett would not be drawn on Mr McAvoy's call. The Government's priorities for local education authorities were raising standards and reducing class sizes, he said. It had no objection to individuals or companies raising funds to pay for pupils to attend independent schools.

"Any local authority diverting money from our main priorities of raising standards and cutting class sizes is doing so against the will of the Government. We will look at Surrey County Council's proposals and make a judgement when we have seen them," he said.



Looking out: Thomas Harding, joint head of the Oxford Channel, at home in the city; the idea is, he says, to get the community involved in programming Photograph: Tom Pilsdon

Studio in a bedroom brings television revolution

By Paul McCann
Media Correspondent

IN A back bedroom in Oxford this week a small television revolution was under way that involved no digital hype, no media moguls and no extra charge to the viewer.

Because this week the first of 14 approved city-wide television franchises opened its doors for business as the Oxford Channel. It is a station that will be free to air, will need no retuning, cable or satellite link, and will sit at Channel 6 on 300,000 buttons only in the university city.

It was created by a clause hid-

den away in the last broadcasting Bill which was largely ignored by the big boys and which allowed for the setting up of something called Restricted Service Licences for Localities (RSLs).

Using small holes in the existing broadcast spectrum and local transmitters, 31 RSLs will be created over the next year or so. Most of them will just air a teletext-style service of local oews and "what's-on" information. The Oxford Channel however wants to go further.

When it launches in the autumn it plans six hours a day of programmes. These will be made by a paid staff of 30 and

dozens of local volunteers who fancy their chances in television.

"For the first time we are really giving people access to the airwaves," said Thomas Harding, joint managing director of Oxford Broadcasting Limited.

"We will have television professionals overseeing the quality control, so it doesn't become unwatchable rubbish like the public access TV in America. But the idea is to try and get the community involved in programming."

Oxford people are to be used as guests, presenters and technicians. Mr Thomas plans a local news service using local

people as video-journalists and editors following their own stories. What's on, entertainment and community information will make up the majority of the output. But it will be delivered in the user-friendly form of chat shows, sports programmes and location reports. And using a feed from Reuters it will even manage its own international news service.

"The idea is that the expansion in television services should not just be about big business," added Mr Thomas. "The obvious development that comes from opening up the spectrum is to make the people respon-

sible for some of their viewing."

The new channel has been freed by the Independent Television Commission from the advertising restrictions that apply to ITV and Channels 4 and 5, so it will be able to air long infomercials which it believes will encourage local advertisers to support it.

"We want the ads to be more part of the service than just hard selling," said Mr Thomas. "Cookery programmes done with local restaurants would meet both our needs."

Its business plan has been approved by both the ITC and the accountancy firm KPMG

who believe its £1.5m annual budget is easily achievable.

City television in the UK is not new, but has so far been restricted to cable channels and existing media owners like Mirror Group's Live TV and Associated Newspapers' Channel Ove. By comparison many of the staff of the Oxford Channel come from the alternative video news magazine *Undercurrents*. This has specialised in filming protests and events ignored by mainstream media.

Now under this licence they have two years to prove that the people can compete with the moguls.

Sue Townsend and Austin Mitchell start novel on Net

By Kate Watson-Smyth

JOHN UPDIKE led the way with the first interactive novel published on the Internet last year and now the fishing port of Grimsby is set to follow in his footsteps.

The beginning of a novel will appear on the Net on Monday and will be written by relay over the next month. The opening paragraphs were written by the playwright

river-bed is found after the thaw following the ice storms of '41 - the reader is not told which century. The only clue is that the body was wearing a pair of earrings depicting a photograph of twins.

Each author added the required 150 words to take the story on, apart from Austin Mitchell, who was so carried away by literary inspiration that he wrote 500 before reluctantly handing over to his wife, Linda McDougall.

She revealed that the photographs on the earrings show the twin daughters of King William of Europe, Princesses Diana and Elizabeth. However, further inquiries found that every female European citizen was given a pair of these earrings on William's accession.

Ms McDougall said she wanted to leave the plot wide open for the next person. "I thought that by making sure that every woman had the earrings the next person will be able to discard that if they don't like it or use it as a clue and develop that theme."

Mr Griffiths said he was so taken with the idea of writing an open-ended story on the Internet that he is considering setting up another one. "You do feel that the story is yours, but I am happy with the way the others have taken it," he said.

Budding authors can find details of how to enter at www.grimsby-online.co.uk.



Novel ideas: Trevor Griffiths and Sue Townsend have written sections



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Bond of the Bard broken as theatrical friends fall out

By David Lister
Arts News Editor

ET TU BRUTE? The Royal Shakespeare Company has been publicly savaged – not by philistines or opponents of public subsidy but by the English Shakespeare Company.

The common bond between the two companies – of bringing the Bard to the masses – has been broken.

The RSC is guilty of "a raiding exercise", neglecting educational and community activity, says Michael Bogdanov, head of the ESC.

That is "a gross calumny," retorts Adrian Noble, artistic director of the RSC, adding for good measure that Mr Bogdanov's comments are "irresponsible" and "destructive".

The falling out is remarkable one. Until recently, Mr Noble would invite Mr Bogdanov to stage plays at the Royal Shakespeare Company, and championed his work there.

But now Mr Bogdanov has turned on his former colleagues with a vengeance.

The focus of the confrontation is Newcastle upon Tyne. The RSC plays a month-long residency in the city, and has done so for 21 years.

The ESC – a company which tours plays nationally – has moved to Newcastle and is using it as the base for educational activity and for launching its tours.

It is perhaps significant that both companies might now be chasing money from the same funding sources for their Newcastle operations.

Mr Bogdanov claims in an article in the North-east arts journal *The Northern Review* that the RSC's residency is "just a raiding exercise on Newcastle, for five or six weeks of the year which takes the city's money".

He accuses the RSC of failing to set up educational and community activities, and says it has "devastated" Newcastle's theatre output.



Creative tension: Alex Jennings in the title role of the latest RSC production of *Hamlet* performed during its recent residency in Newcastle upon Tyne. Photograph: Clive Barba

"I'm not saying the RSC shouldn't come to Newcastle," he added. "But what is wrong is that the policy has not opened out and developed after its initial impact. The RSC should have had a much more comprehensive and ideological stance – which is what I hope we are now supplying."

Last night, Mr Noble responded: "I feel saddened that Michael Bogdanov has found it necessary to attack the RSC, presumably to subvert funding for his own plans in this region ..."

"The RSC's commitment to the North-east is indubitable. Each year,

between 12 and 16 Stratford productions have formed a month-long Newcastle season before transferring to the Barbican Theatre in London. Over this time, the RSC has formed a great bond with the people of the North-east."

And, plunging the dagger back

into his attacker and erstwhile colleague, Mr Noble warned that the ESC's educational activity could affect the work of the North-east's own companies.

He said: "I entirely support Michael for wanting to develop further community and educational

activities in the region, but it would be wholly wrong if these activities were to eventually affect the work of the region's indigenous theatre companies, like the excellent Northern Stage, who must have prime responsibility for this work."

Jails to get an extra £69m

By Jason Bennett
Crime Correspondent

THE SOARING prison population is continuing to drain money from the Government coffers as the Home Office was forced yesterday to announce an extra £69m to cope with overcrowding.

The additional money, which will help keep the prison ship afloat, follows earlier promises of a £43m cash injection in the past year. The extra cash up to April 1999 comes on top of the existing prison budget of £1,704m.

Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, said yesterday that the extra £112m would provide 1,540 new jail places and the placing of an additional 2,280 prisoners in existing accommodation in England and Wales. It will cover the building of six new house blocks in jails around the country, the conversion of existing prison space into cells and the continued use of the prison ship HMP *Weare*, in Portland harbour, Dorset.

The total prison population in England and Wales currently stands at more than 64,300. The most recent Home Office estimates suggest that if current trends continue, that figure could rise to between 82,800 and 92,600 by 2005, requiring the building of up to 24 additional jails at a cost of £2bn.

The recent predictions are far higher than previous ones, raising concerns that the Home Office will have to continue to pour in huge amounts of extra money for the next decade.

Tougher sentences and an increased willingness by the courts to jail more people for longer periods is blamed for the continued rise in the number of people behind bars.

Jack Straw hopes that extending non-custodial sentences, such as home curfews for those convicted monitored by electronic tags, will help to stem the rise, which has meant 20,000 extra inmates in four years.

British cars are the dearest in Europe

By Katherine Butler
Brussels

BRITISH motorists are getting a raw deal from car makers despite the strength of sterling according to a new survey which shows the UK is still the most expensive place in Europe to buy a car.

And although Europe is supposed to be a single market Britons still face overwhelming obstacles to shopping around for bargains on the continent. Dealers are either flouting their obligation to supply right-hand drive models or are simply refusing to sell to foreigners, the European Commission found.

For 61 of the 72 best-selling

models covered by the study prices in the UK were highest. The biggest difference was on a Volkswagen Polo which costs around 30 per cent more than in most other EU countries and 54 per cent more than in Portugal.

The strength of sterling ought to have driven car prices down the commission said, yet it found that most car-makers have not only failed to cut prices in Britain in response to the rise in sterling but have raised them to cash in on windfall profits.

The cheapest cars according to the study are to be had in the Netherlands and Portugal, and the difference between prices in

these countries and those at the other end of the scale is widening, said the commission – which carries out checks every six months.

British car prices are highest the study shows for luxury, medium and small cars alike. A top of the range BMW 316i for example costs 22 per cent more in Britain than across the channel in Belgium or 30 per cent more than in Holland. The differential also applies for small cars: the gap in price between a Toyota Starlet in Belgium or Luxembourg and in Britain is over 40 per cent.

Brussels recently declared war on Volkswagen which after a lengthy investigation was

found to be illegally preventing German citizens from buying cheaper cars from Italian dealers. VW was hit with the biggest fine ever imposed on a company by the EU but the latest survey confirms suspicions that such practices as well as price-fixing are widespread in the industry.

The commission said it was receiving "continual complaints" from British consumers who want to buy abroad to save money but find it impossible to order right-hand drive models. Yesterday, it warned manufacturers that right-hand drives must be available throughout the EU to dealers who want to sell them and warned it would

take legal enforcement action.

Unsurprisingly, the European Consumers' Organisation said Volkswagen-style tactics were the main obstacle for British motorists hunting for cheaper cars on the continent. "Dealers

will either tell you they cannot supply a right-hand drive model, or that the delivery time will be excessive or they will just refuse to sell you a car".

Under the EU's single market rules, consumers have a

right to buy a car anywhere in the bloc and import it into their own country. But administrative and bureaucratic obstacles are still hampering what the commission calls "parallel trade".



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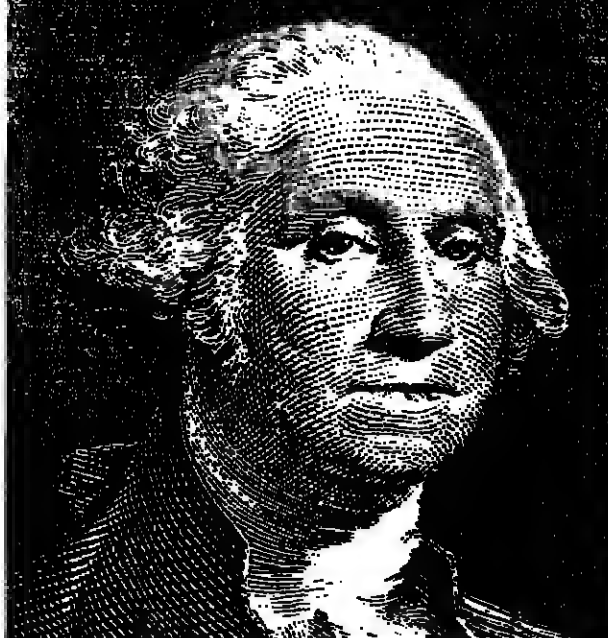
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Trial by grand jury looms for Lewinsky

By John Carlin in Washington

Monica Lewinsky returned to Washington from California to comfort her mother, the victim of a battering from Kenneth Starr's grand-jury inquisitions, as controversy raged over whether White House Secret Service agents should be compelled to testify against the man they are sworn to protect.

In a climate of bewildering procedural confusion the one thing that now appears as certain as anything else is that Ms Lewinsky, the 24-year-old former White House intern alleged to have had sex with the President, will be facing the music herself before the grand jury next week.

Her mother, Marcia Lewis, was scheduled to have undergone a third successive day of interrogation on Thursday but



Kenneth Starr: Focus on Secret Service evidence

"the torture", as Ms Lewinsky's lawyer described it, was postponed pending developments on the matter of the Secret Service agents' testimony.

Mike Leibig, a lawyer who represents a 500-member association of Secret Service officers, said it was inappropriate

to compel any testimony that makes it difficult to protect the First Family. "We've expressed that view in a letter," Mr Leibig said. "I don't know what Starr's office has decided to do."

Mr Leibig is also acting on behalf of Lewis Fox, a retired Secret Service agent quoted in the *Washington Post* this week as saying he had seen the President and Ms Lewinsky alone in the White House at the end of 1995. Now that story is changing. "That's not his recollection," Mike Leibig said of his client, Mr Fox. The officer "saw them together", but "he could not tell whether they were alone or not. He knows they were in the Oval Office, but he does not know whether there were other people in the room."

At least one other Secret Service agent who worked in the White House has received a

subpoena to appear before the grand jury by Mr Starr, the independent counsel investigating Mr Clinton.

Attorney-General Janet Reno, drawn in to arbitrate on the controversy, said the Justice Department was reviewing the question of whether the government should oppose subpoenas for members of the Secret Service. "We're trying to review all of the issues; obvious among them is the security and the safety of the president of the United States," Mrs Reno said.

The word "safety" could be interpreted in two ways, since Mr Starr is apparently convinced eyewitness evidence from a Secret Service agent could contradict Mr Clinton's public denials, and Ms Lewinsky's denial under oath last month, that they engaged in an "improper" relationship.



Seeking safety: Sierra Leone refugees arriving at the Guinean capital Conakry, fleeing fighting in Freetown as the Nigerian-led force tries to depose leaders of last year's coup against the elected government. Photograph: Corinne Dufka

Shake-up ends Germany's cosy university life

By Imre Karacs in Bonn

GERMANY'S middle-aged students are to be turfed out of their cosy alma mater, their professors submitted to independent scrutiny, and state funding of universities will be linked to performance.

These and other proposals were approved by the lower house of the Parliament yesterday, heralding a revolution in the German world of learning. While the argument over some aspects of the controversial Further Education Bill is set to reverberate in the upper chamber of the Bundesrat, the most important changes will come into effect in the next academic year.

It takes, on average, more than seven years for a German to get his or her university diploma. Under the new law, they should be able to attain their Masters in four and a half years. Institutes will also be allowed to introduce courses leading up to a shorter Bachelor's degree.

To hurry them along, universities will henceforth be compelled to test their students' progress in examinations, and even to expel those who repeatedly fail to make the grade. Endless re-takes will not be tolerated.

After years of debate and commissions of inquiry, the politicians have discovered the formula that will not only help focus the scholars' minds, but should also channel tax-payers' money more effectively.

The arithmetic that academics have failed to grasp is as follows: university funding has remained static for the last 20 years, while the number of students has doubled. The students, subsidised to the hilt and paying no fees, were staying on longer and longer, increasing congestion in the lecture theatres. In a fast-moving world, German undergraduates often hit the job market in their thirties, their knowledge already well out of date.

The next generation of graduates will now be younger, leaner and, hopefully, better qualified. With the laggards out of the way, universities should

be able to devote more attention to students who are not there simply to enjoy the social life.

Standards are to be raised, too. Under the new law, curricula will be more tightly organised and regularly monitored by independent inspectors. Part of the state's contribution will be subject to the performance of staff in teaching as well as research.

The progress of women through the faculties will be another factor the authorities will take into account when doling out the money. An estimated 5 per cent of academic staff are women, confined mostly to the lower and middle rungs of the career ladder.

The students will be able to mark their lecturers' performance. Research will be evaluated by peer reviews, and both the ability to teach and academic achievement will count for promotions.

Universities will also be allowed to select their students.

University funding has remained static for the last 20 years, while the number of students has doubled

The present system is a lottery. Applicants are sorted according to their grades but are then distributed among Germany's seats of learning. Some courses, such as medicine, can limit their intake, but most cannot. The new law will allow universities to make some selection themselves, but only for the limited intake courses, and only for 20 per cent of the places available.

Tens of thousands of students took to the streets at the end of last year, sworn to fight this Bill. They may be back next month, when the Bill goes to the upper chamber for approval. The Social Democrats and the Greens are fighting a provision which would allow universities to fine students who want to re-take a year. Another messy compromise looms.

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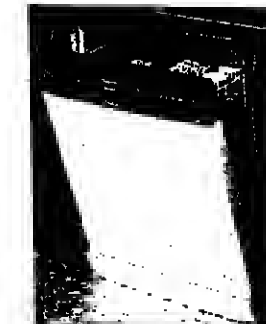
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Australia set for a battle royal

A vote next year will decide whether to ditch the Queen and become a republic, Robert Milliken writes in Sydney

ALMOST a century after their constitution came into being, Australians vote next year to decide whether to remove the British monarchy from it and become a republic.

The decision to call a referendum to decide whether to end the last constitutional link with Britain came at the end of a constitutional convention in Canberra yesterday, where 152 delegates decided overwhelmingly that the question should go to a public vote. It voted 133-17 to set up a referendum, after agreeing earlier by 89-52 to support in principle that Australia become a republic.

Republican delegates at the two-week convention clapped and hugged when the results were announced. John Howard, the Prime Minister, and a monarchist, told the convention it had spoken "very clearly". If Australia voted yes to become a republic, it should make the change on 1 January 2001, the centenary of the country's federation.

There are two big hurdles still in the way of the change. The first is that the constitution is hard to change. Amending referendums must win a majority nationally and also a majority in four of the six states.

The second problem is that, despite the convention's support for a republic in principle, the question of what form of republic Australia should become is destined to divide the referendum campaign. Four different models, from four different blocs, fought for support at the Canberra convention.

The model that won did so by four votes. It proposes that the head of state who replaces the Queen be approved by a two-thirds majority of federal parliament, after candidates have been nominated by the

people, sifted by a committee and boiled down to one by the prime minister and leader of the opposition.

The aim is to avoid any disruption to Australia's Westminster system by preserving the head of state's largely ceremonial functions. Dissident republicans, who wanted the head of state elected directly by the people, have branded this model a "mule republic".

Mr Howard privately believes the referendum will fail. His conservative coalition will campaign neither for nor against. He said members of the Liberal Party, which he leads, will have a free vote. He had little choice: six Liberal ministers have come out as republicans and more are expected to follow. Kim Beazley, the Labor Party opposition leader, said his party would campaign for the referendum.

It could also be that Australians will swing behind the referendum as the country prepares for celebrations to mark the 2001 centenary. The Canberra convention captured the country's imagination. Thousands queued at the original Parliament House to watch republicans and monarchists debate the pros and cons of removing the monarchy from a constitution drawn up in Queen Victoria's day.

The convention came 100 years after three conventions that drew up the constitution. These were largely non-elected and entirely male. Half the delegates to the 1998 convention were elected in a postal ballot, half appointed by the government. Almost half were women, and five were Aborigines.

The monarchists maintained that tacking a republic on to Australia's constitution would bring the Westminster system

crashing down. Younger delegates said it was all about ditching the last vestiges of Australia's colonial past and recognising the reality of its multicultural society. Jason Yat-Sun Li, 25, a lawyer and son of Chinese immigrants from Hong Kong, said: "I have a vision in which an ethnic Australian may be elected head of state."

The Queen was barely mentioned at the convention. It would seem that her biggest worry will not be if the referendum decides to end her family's reign over Australia since 1788, but if it produces an inconclusive result, leaving her to stay on as a head of state who is not really wanted.



Janet Holmes à Court, the businesswoman and republican supporter, with the convention chairman, Ian Sinclair at the close yesterday Photograph: AP

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Cook inspects devastation of Montserrat

By Phil Davison
in St John's, Antigua

ROBIN COOK will become the first Foreign Secretary to set foot on a "British dependent territory" in the Caribbean today when he visits the volcano-stricken Montserrat. Mr Cook said in Antigua yesterday that he wants to see for himself the effects of two years of devastation on the island and to reassure the 3,000 remaining islanders that Britain is not trying to force them out.

Most islanders said yesterday that they would receive Mr Cook politely but were still highly suspicious of Britain's longer-term motives. They noted that the British government was conditioning its promise of supporting the islanders on reports by British scientists of the activity of the Soufriere Hills volcano.

"At any moment, they could tell us 'the volcano's getting dangerous, we've got to get you all out,'" said George, a Montserrat taxi driver. "What kind of security does that offer us?" The remaining islanders, just over one-quarter of the 11,000 inhabitants before the first eruption of 1995, are squeezed into a small northern area, with two-thirds of the island, including the capital, Plymouth, abandoned.

"I certainly hope Mrs Short's not coming with him," several islanders said yesterday, referring to Clare Short, the Secretary of State for International Development.

Ms Short disgusted the islanders, most of whom had lost their homes and possessions and were living with relatives or in shelters, late last year when she criticised their calls for gold-en elephants next," she said at the time, when all most wanted was a single-room house and the reopening of schools.

Despite anti-British protests last year, islanders said Mr Cook would be well treated,

particularly for visiting them during the latest Gulf crisis.

After listening to the problems of Montserratian refugees on the neighbouring island of Antigua this morning, he is to fly to Montserrat by helicopter. The island's airstrip was closed last year, before a pyroclastic flow thundered down on it, destroying the terminal building and covering the airport with ash.

During a helicopter tour of the devastated areas, including Plymouth, Mr Cook hopes to touch down briefly at the airstrip to see the damage, unless he is warned that the volcano could erupt again. Scientists say the volcano's dome has been rebuilding again at the rate of eight cubic metres per second since its most recent major eruption last December. As a result, the British governor, Tony Abbott, and local government have stopped special trips into the evacuated zone by insurance assessors and residents with passes to retrieve possessions.

Before flying to Antigua yesterday, Mr Cook chaired the second day of a "Caribbean Forum" in Nassau, the Bahamas, during which he was expected to pledge a higher priority to Britain's "dependent territories," now to be called "overseas territories". At the forum, Britain was to donate a brand new, £500,000 40ft fast boat for training the coastguards of Caribbean nations in anti-narcotics sweeps.

Also at the forum, the Commonwealth Development Corporation, along with several private banks, were to announce new "micro-credits" to help small businesses start up as alternatives to the traditional industries, notably bananas. Many Caribbean residents see narcotics and bananas as increasingly inter-linked. United States measures which affect Caribbean banana production are opening the door to drug production or trafficking, the residents insist.

Hardware of war chills the desert breeze

By Raymond Whitaker
in Kuwait

THE CONCRETE bunkers of the Ali al-Salem air base in Kuwait loom up from the flat desert landscape like plastic building bricks on a carpet. It takes a moment or two to realise that, despite their 20ft thick walls, each has been cracked open, their heavy doors twisted or blown off, by laser-guided bombs exactly like the ones being mounted on the wings of the RAF Tornados parked

outside. Suddenly the threat of military conflict with Iraq, only 33 miles away, seems a lot less unreal.

A week ago the eight Tornado fighter-bombers, their crews, equipment and support personnel were still in Europe. But as the diplomatic options narrow and the military build-up in the Gulf increases, the RAF finds itself using military facilities which the allies attacked seven years ago to deny them to Saddam Hussein's invading forces. The sand

around the bunkers is still littered with lumps of concrete and metal from that war.

The coalition against Iraq is much smaller this time, and the goal of using armed force – unconditional inspection of Baghdad's weapons facilities – immeasurably harder to achieve. In all probability the Ali al-Salem base, last used by the RAF in 1961, would not have been pressed into service if alternatives in Saudi Arabia, a safer distance from Iraq, had been available. Kuwaiti civilians

and nomadic Bedouins have been advised to move out of the area.

The danger of handing President Saddam a propaganda coup if large numbers of Iraqi civilians are killed in air attacks was not far from the minds of Air Commodore Peter Harris, the most senior RAF officer in the Gulf region, or of the visiting Lord Gilbert, the defence procurement minister. In using terms such as "minimum collateral damage" and "precision bombing", they recalled the

exaggerated claims of 1991, but Air Commodore Harris insisted: "Our targets and tactics would be selected to keep civilian casualties hopefully to zero. We have the skill to pinpoint our attacks."

Behind him, sleek 1,000lb bombs were being loaded in a chill desert breeze.

Lord Gilbert, the latest of a succession of British and American officials to swing through the Gulf rallying support, said the weaponry that might be used this time was "even more ac-

curate than seven years ago". To questions about the strength of the coalition against President Saddam, he replied that it was "growing all the time, almost by the hour". British lives would be at risk, he added, "which is exactly why we would prefer a diplomatic solution".

The operational aircrews were kept away from the press, but the visit was a diversion of sorts for the ground crews, deprived of alcohol and anxious for news of the ructions at Chelsea football club. "It's just

like bloody Norfolk – flat and noisy," said one engineer as a Tornado ripped overhead.

Any questions about the dangers they faced were greeted with similar jocularity, but last time the Tornados suffered proportionately higher losses than any other type of aircraft, having been used in low-level attacks on airfields. Their role, though almost certainly not their tactics, would be similar this time, deploying 1,000lb and 2,000lb Paveway III laser-guided bombs.

An older officer looking on was more reflective than his juniors. "When I first went into the RAF, none of the people of my present age had any medals, and they were proud of it," he said.

"That's how effective we were in keeping the peace. Now I have three campaign medals and a decoration, plus some foreign ones I'm not allowed to wear, and it's the same for the rest of my generation. The world has got more dangerous."

Labour MP warns of 'genocidal' strike

By Fran Abrams
Political Correspondent

BOMBING Saddam Hussein's biological and chemical weapons sites would have a "genocidal" effect on the Iraqi people and on neighbouring countries, a Labour MP said yesterday.

Tam Dalyell, member for Linlithgow and one of a group of MPs opposing the threatened military strike, said in a Commons debate that "by a sort of dreadful collusion with Saddam that the US and British governments will be directly contributing to genocide."

He quoted from a letter to the Secretary of State for Defence, George Robertson, and to Robin Cook, the Foreign Secretary, from an Open University professor, Stephen Rose, which warned that the danger to people in neighbouring states would be "incalculable". The letter said: "If the bombing is effective we are faced with the inevitable, uncontrolled release of large quantities of lethal agents, including presumably nerve and mustard gas as well as anthrax and radioactive materials."

"These agents will drift over significant areas of Iraq resulting in further illness and death amongst its already impoverished citizens and will not stop at Iraq's borders."

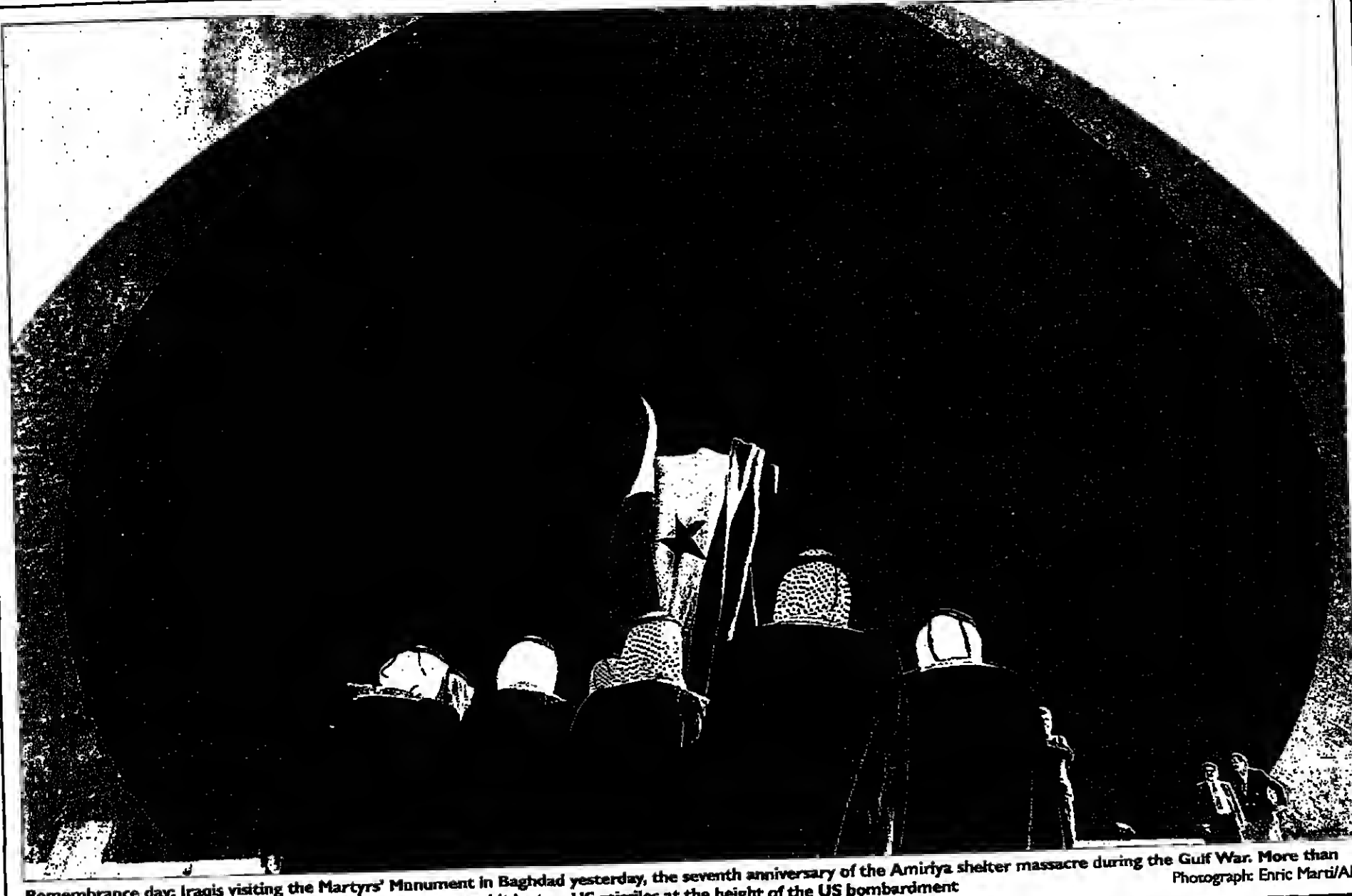
Mr Dalyell also claimed that Mr Cook's Livingston constituents, whom he used to rep-

resent, were not impressed by his stance. "I don't think they want their present MP, the Foreign Secretary, prancing around the Middle East trying to drum up support for allowing the British use of bases from which in these circumstances to launch weapons of awesome destruction," he said.

Replying, the Foreign Office minister Derek Fatchett said that only the threat of military action could bring hope of Iraq complying with UN Security Council resolutions.

"Without that [military] option there would be no chance of the diplomatic process being successful. And that is what we have been seeking ... and will continue to seek," he said. "If we play the game in a way that appears to be appeasement to dictatorship, the consequences that will follow, we should know from the history of this century, are considerably more horrific than standing up to dictatorship."

After Mr Dalyell said that Tony Blair should avoid making the mistakes of his predecessor Anthony Eden, who was forced to resign after Britain invaded Egypt during the Suez Crisis in 1956, Mr Fatchett accused him of an "unworthy" personal attack on both the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary. The exchanges came ahead of next Tuesday's full-day debates in both Houses of Parliament.



Remembrance day: Iraqis visiting the Martyrs' Monument in Baghdad yesterday, the seventh anniversary of the Amirya shelter massacre during the Gulf War. More than 400 civilians died on 13 February 1991 when the shelter was hit by two US missiles at the height of the US bombardment

Photograph: Eric Marti/AP

Russia's links with Baghdad embarrass diplomatic drive

THE ADVERT might have read something like this: neglected former empire, with serious health and money worries, seeks new friends to share companionship, business dealings, and a penchant for showing Americans that they are not the only heavyweights on the planet. Pariahs welcome.

The lonely heart, of course, is Russia whose relationship with Baghdad is now proving so frustrating to policy makers in Washington as they put the final touches to their plans to bomb Iraq.

True, Iraq cannot exactly be described as a new friend – ties go well back into Soviet times – but its relationship with Moscow has been recast in the last few years during Russia's slow drift away from an exclusively pro-Western liberal foreign policy.

That much is clear every time Boris Yeltsin lurches onto the world stage with his theatrical predictions that a strike against Iraq could lead to a third world war. But now a far more sinister dimension to the relationship is being presented to the world.

Russia stands accused of using its foreign intelligence agents covertly to help Saddam Hussein in his efforts to thwart United Nations inspectors. It is alleged that Moscow may even have sold – or, at least, planned to sell – equipment to pursue his murderous goals, by striking a deal with Baghdad to supply an animal feed fermentation tank that could also have been used to make biological weapons.

The claims arose in Thursday's *Washington Post*, and seem to have come from a source in the CIA. Yesterday the *Times* repeated part of them, adding an account of a meeting by members of the UN Special Commission (Unscm), who in 1996 gathered at a hotel in Basingstoke, Hampshire to prepare for a trip to Iraq.

The *Times* said an official was seen

Phil Reeves in Moscow examines claims that Russia helped Saddam over arms inspections

pumping information out of Russian commission members every night. He turned out to be the London-based "resident" from the Russian foreign intelligence service, SVR. When the team eventually arrived at a suspect site in Iraq, they found their way blocked by Iraqi troops, who had apparently been tipped off.

Both stories have been angrily dismissed by Moscow officials. The *Times* account was waved aside by the Federal Security Service. "Any sensible person can see it lacks common sense and logic," said spokesman Yuri Kobaladze. "What would be the point of our 'resident' officer going to Hampshire to meet our representatives?"

Discerning the truth in a conflict in which both sides are experts is difficult. But it is easy to see why the West is suspicious of Moscow. For most of the decade Russia's foreign policy has been steadily pro-Western. Hungry for loans, debt relief, foreign investment, renewed global clout and a means to force the repayment of Soviet era debts, Moscow has pressed consistently for integration into international, Western-run institutions.

Now it has shifted to more ambivalent ground. It has watched unhappily as Nato prepares to march to its borders. It has seen the United States grab a hefty stake in the Caspian, whose vast oil reserves Moscow grew used to covet as its own. Whilst it

knows it will long be financially dependent on the West – and cannot truly welcome the prospect of a heavily armed Saddam – it is casting about for a new role.

Central to this process is the figure of Yevgeny Primakov, a fluent Arab speaker whose friendship with Saddam Hussein stretches back three decades. The Western media rarely mentions the Foreign Minister's name without reminding their customers that he is the former head of foreign intelligence.

Yet he is subtler figure than a knee-jerk Cold Warrior. He is a pragmatic geopolitical strategist who is looking for a counterweight to American power and a means of restoring the status of Russian diplomacy. Critics he has aplenty. He is making a "grave mistake", wrote Michael McFaul, an analyst at the Moscow Carnegie Centre. "The economic advantages of open trade with Iraq are only a fraction of the potential economic benefits of Western integration."

Mr Primakov is, however, far from master of his destiny. A handful of mighty energy and banking interests stand guard constantly at his shoulder, trying to fuse foreign policy with their interests. Last year Russia struck a multi-billion dollar deal to develop the Qurna oil field in southern Iraq, agreeing not to go ahead until UN sanctions are lifted. Lukoil, the leader of the consortium involved in the contract, is widely considered one of the handful.

Before Iraq invaded Kuwait in 1990, the Soviet Union had thousands of specialists in Baghdad. It had played a part in the development of 15 Iraqi oil fields. The army used Soviet aircraft and Soviet tanks, having spent some \$7bn (£4.3bn) on arms – a bill that is still unpaid. When the Iraq conflict is settled, expect to see Moscow cashing in its favours.

Iran unyielding on Rushdie death-threat

By Andrew Marshall
and agencies

ON THE ninth anniversary of the fatwa against Salman Rushdie, Britain yesterday called for Iran to find a "satisfactory solution" to the impasse over the death sentence it has passed on the writer.

"The European Union welcomes the new Iranian government's stated commitment to

respect the rule of law and their emphasis on the need for a dialogue of civilisations," a statement from the Foreign Office said. Britain holds the presidency of the EU. But signs from Iran were not encouraging. A judicial official said the Indian-born British writer must be killed. "The shedding of this man's blood is obligatory," said Morteza Moqtadaie, Iran's chief prosecutor. In a fatwa, or

decree, on 14 February, 1989, Ayatollah Khomeini said Rushdie should be killed for allegedly insulting the Prophet Muhammad in his book *The Satanic Verses*. Since then he has lived largely in hiding and under protection of the British government. "Any Muslim who hears an insult to the Prophet must kill the person who commits the insult. It is better that those closest to that person try

to kill him first," Mr Moqtadaie said in a sermon at Tehran University. Worshippers shouted *Allahu Akbar* [God is great] when he said "Rushdie must die." Mr Moqtadaie, a cleric, said that during his lifetime Muhammad sent two people to cut the throat of a man who had insulted him. "What Khomeini did is exactly what the Prophet did, and this [death sentence] must be preserved."

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The black heart of Indian politics

By Peter Popham in New Delhi

TWO DAYS before polling begins in the world's biggest election, there is little doubt about the most important issue – and it is nothing to do with policies. It is the infestation of Indian politics by criminals.

It is not a party issue, because no party, except arguably the Communists, is untainted. To speak of sleaze would be to indulge in quaint understatement. India's problems are not free nights at the Ritz or cash for questions, nor are they limited to kickbacks from government contracts. India's nightmare is the likely election to parliament of dozens of mainstream candidates who are hardened, violent criminals, often gang leaders, several of them with multiple murders to their name.

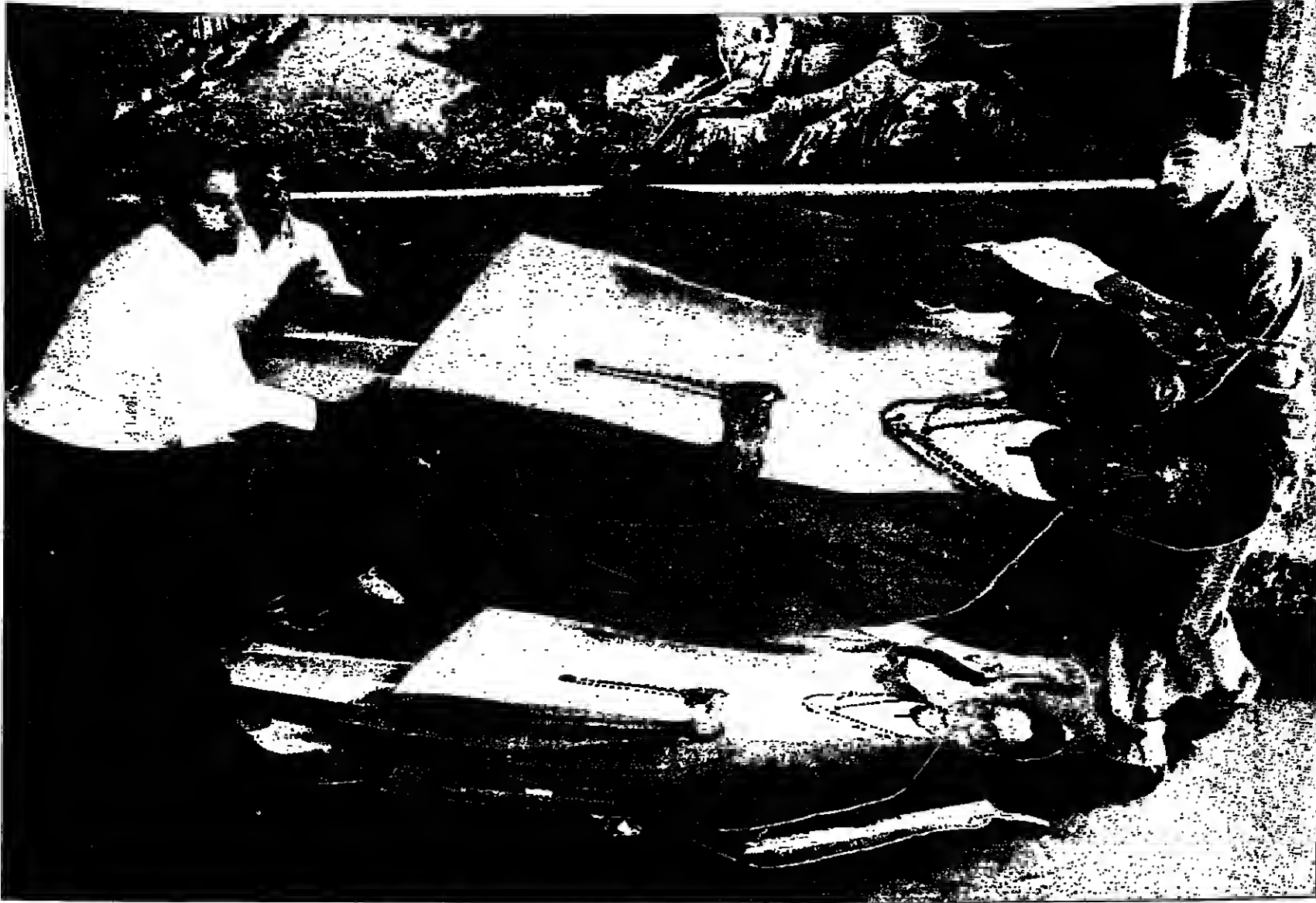
On Thursday a panel consisting of a retired Supreme Court judge and three other upstanding citizens, sponsored by the weekly magazine *Outlook*, presented the findings of their research into the criminalisation of Indian politics. More than 4,000 candidates are contesting this election. The panel had the resources to examine 500 of those in the mainstream parties. Of those, more than 70, in the panel's judgement, deserve to be barred from standing.

"To have true democracy in this country," said Justice Kuldip Singh, a former Supreme Court judge, "... there must be stringent laws barring those who have criminal records from participating in the elections."

It may come as a surprise that India has no such law. At present any citizen can stand for election in India unless they have had a criminal conviction upheld by the Supreme Court. In theory this ought to be enough to keep the criminals out but so long-drawn-out is the judicial process, and so susceptible to political pressure, that many confirmed, indeed outrageous criminals, are strolling the corridors of power.

Phoolan Devi, the "bandit queen" from the ravines of Madhya Pradesh, is only the most infamous example. After shooting to death 22 upper-caste villagers in revenge for being raped and abused years earlier, the female gang leader was held in prison for 11 years without being brought to trial. When members of her own caste came to power in the state she was released, and is now running for a second term as the Samajwadi Party's candidate for Mirzapur in Uttar Pradesh.

It is the "Hindi belt" of impoverished North Indian states, including Uttar Pradesh, which provide the most flagrant examples of the criminalisation of politics. Uttar Pradesh is the biggest state in the



Flat plan: Party workers carrying cut-outs of Bal Thackeray, the prominent Hindu, to various election campaign sites in Bombay yesterday

Photograph: AP

Union, with a population of 140 million, if it were a sovereign country it would be the eighth biggest in the world, bigger than Japan. Last October the state was the scene of a power struggle between two chief ministers. The victorious minister, Kalyan Singh, clinched his triumph by luring dozens of representatives to his side of the chamber with promises of ministerial posts. The result was the biggest cabinet in Indian history, 93 members, of which at least 17 had criminal backgrounds. The new ministers included Hari Shankar Tiwari, a gang leader with nine murder cases pending

against him, and Prem Prakash Singh, the "Terror of Terai", accused of two cases of murder and three of attempted murder.

What made Kalyan Singh's coup all the more perturbing was that he is a prominent member of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the Hindu Nationalist Party which has long asserted that it is the only party of principle left in the country. By this cynical manoeuvre Kalyan Singh indicated that the BJP is just opportunistic as its rivals. The BJP was briefly in power at the centre last year, and may well win the coming election. The political rise of the "Goondas" or

Mafiosi reflects the fact that much of the Indian hinterland is still in the grip of feudalistic overlords who control their communities through menace and terror. The rapid succession of expensive elections, and the absence of real policy issues, has brought a frightening symbiosis into being between the political parties on the one hand, strapped for cash and eager for winnable candidates; and cash-happy Goondas, glad of a way to launder their funds and legitimise their power.

"Most political parties are prepared to embrace them for the power they can exercise over their caste or community with their ferocious image," wrote Alok Sharma recently in *The Pioneer*. The ultimate blame for this state of affairs is laid at the door of Indira Gandhi, who, while prime minister in the Seventies, removed the ceiling on election expenditure, thus practically inviting gangsters to parley their black money into political power through the election process. The consequence is seen in the benighted condition of huge tracts of Northern India, which look exactly as desperate and lawless as you would expect of places ruled by outlaws.

Germans seize Kurdish suspect

German prosecutors said they had detained a 33-year-old Kurd suspected of being a regional leader of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and carrying out arson attacks on behalf of the banned group. The Federal Prosecutor's Office in Karlsruhe said the Turkish citizen, identified only as Aygul B., had been detained in Dortmund earlier this week. The woman took over a leading position in the PKK for a region of western Germany including Essen, Duisburg and Dortmund.

— Reuters, Bonn

SA Aids toll

The Health Minister, Nkomo Zuma, said 1,500 South Africans were infected every day with the virus that causes Aids. A spokesman said around 2 million South Africans were unaware they were infected with HIV. The United Nations programme UNAIDS estimates 2.4 million of South Africa's population of just under 40 million are already infected with HIV, more than the total number infected in the whole of the Americas.

— Reuters, Cape Town

Frozen out

Alexander Lebed, who once said he wanted only one job, Russia's presidency, has decided to run for governor of a Siberian province as a stepping-stone to the Kremlin. "I've ... put my faith in the hands of the people of Krasnoyarsk. If they decide their governor is worthy of running for president, then I will go. If not, then it's useless."

— AP, Moscow

Driving force

Germany's Foreign Ministry has sent Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze a new armour-plated limousine to replace the one damaged in Monday's unsuccessful assassination attempt. A spokesman said Germany was indebted to him for his role in events leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall and Germany's unification. The former Soviet foreign minister was in a motorcade in Tbilisi when assailants with grenade launchers opened fire. He was unhurt.

— Reuters, Bonn

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Surprisingly ordinary prices



Prize winners: 'Independent' photographers shine at World Press Photo contest and take Nikon's Fashion Photographer of the Year title



Haunting anguish of Algerian mother

"Woman Grieves after Massacre in Bentaha"
By Hocine

HOCINE never found out the name of his "madonna in hell". He returned to the village of Bentaha after the massacre of 23 September but she had disappeared, her anguish on Hocine's unforgettable photographs forever that of every grieving Algerian, the Unknown Sufferer in Algeria's war of unknown killers. The bodies had been cleared from the streets when Hocine reached Bentaha and he almost lost the photograph that would soon challenge Robert Capa's dying Spanish civil war soldier and AP's napalm-burned Vietnamese girl, and that has now been judged the World Press Photo of 1997 in the biggest international competition for professional press photographers.

Hocine - who for security reasons never uses his family name - went to the local hospital where relatives were waiting for the names of the 300 slaughtered villagers. "I asked a policeman if I could take pictures and he said 'No,'" he was to recall later. "Then I saw this woman leaning against a guard post weeping. I took several shots and changed my film before the cops made me hand it over." He gave the police only a blank roll; the image of the grief of the mother of eight murdered children was saved to haunt the world. Hocine is 44 and the oldest of Algeria's surviving 20 war photographers (at least six have been murdered) and he knows the risks. "People are much more frightened of a camera than of a Kalashnikov [rifle]," he says. "... if you walk around the streets with a camera, someone will put a bullet in your head." Last September, he transmitted just two frames of the woman to Paris. "I felt like I hadn't got any good pictures. I only realised the next day, when Paris told me."

Adventure in fashion takes prize

Sheridan Morley
Fashion Photographer of the Year

THE freelance photographer Sheridan Morley was named 1997 Fashion Photographer of the Year at the Nikon Press Awards on Thursday night. The prize of £1,500 was presented to Ms Morley for her diverse portfolio of fashion photography, including three images commissioned for *The Independent* Saturday Magazine and the *Independent on Sunday* Review. She arrived at Bafia for the ceremony just in time after a day shooting a fashion story for next week's *Independent*.

A oews and fashion photographer for *Today* newspaper until 1995, Ms Morley has covered the catwalk shows for *The Independent* but has recently concentrated on her own style of fashion photography. The judges described her work as "very controlled... very beautiful and adventurous".

Fashion was introduced as a separate category for the first time this year with entrants invited to submit a portfolio of five



Africa's children take the floor

"Ballroom Dance in Townships"
By Jodie Bieber

THIS PICTURE of Mrs Paleman's dance academy in Ennerdale, south of Johannesburg, won the Arts Single Image award.

In the accompanying story, published in the *Independent on Sunday* in November last year, Mary Braid wrote describing how ballroom dancing had caught the imagination of black children from the South African townships.

The academy is in a "coloured" area, but also recruits children from the neighbouring black squatter camp.

Jodie Bieber has freelanced for a variety of international and South African newspapers and magazines for the past six years. Before taking up photography professionally, she was a media planner for an advertising agency.

Yesterday she said that she loved the sense of pride that



came through in the ballroom dancing picture.

"Africa is always portrayed in such a negative way, it's always poverty and starving children. That is part of the continent's story but not it all," she said.

"In this picture the children's sense of pride shines through. For me, that's what the image is all about, it's about hope and the positive."

The children's teacher, Paul Kgola, begins dance practice by telling his young coloured and black pupils that they can achieve anything if they put

their minds to it. He tells them to think of themselves as winners, and their successes in competitions are proof that his particular approach works.

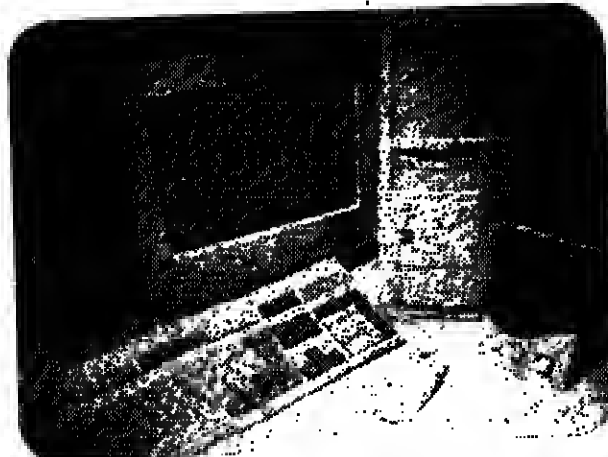
Apartheid once prevented black dancers from competing against whites. Although the

racially segregated dancing associations only amalgamated two years ago, the children at Ennerdale are already picking up the top prizes.

Jodie Bieber also won second prize in the arts picture story category in the international competition.

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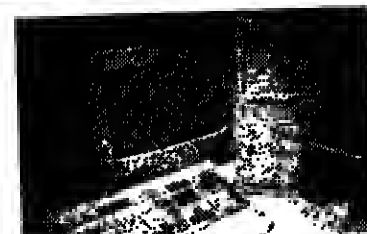


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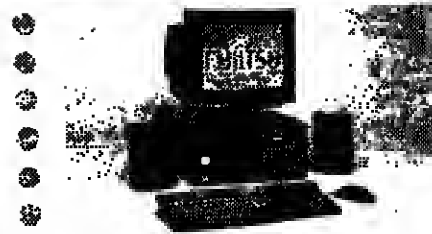


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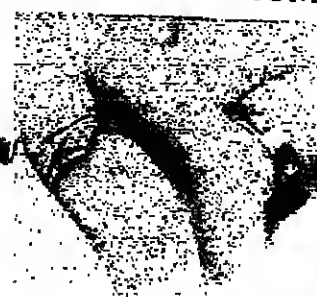
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Family bond of two men and a baby

Sam and Rob may not be a traditional couple, but their commitment to each other is just as strong, says Emma Cook

MARRIAGE FOR THE MILLENNIUM



SAM AND ROB are typical expectant parents-to-be. Sipping red wine in a Soho pub, they both talk excitedly of the months ahead; of how they're looking forward to the next scan; the reality of sleepless nights with a crying baby and changing nappies, the resigned acceptance that life will never be quite the same again come July. Sam's eyes light up with pride when he talks about his first response to the pregnancy. "When I found out it was just extraordinary. It was complete elation."

Except that they're not typical. Rob, an architect, and Sam, a book editor, are a gay couple who met mother-to-be Kate through an advertisement in the gay press earlier last year. Kate, also gay, has a four-year-old son, Ben, with another gay donor who sees the child regularly and plans to help out when Kate's second child is born. They all live near each other in north London.

On paper, the scenario seems extremely complicated, or as Sam admits, "a potential negotiating nightmare". Yet,

as they map out their various plans and childcare arrangements, you realise it's a great deal more straightforward, emotionally at least, than so many messy domestic set-ups. But unlike the aftermath of divorce, their situation is borne out of a desire to have a child, not based around a failed relationship. So there are no hostile feelings or power games to be resolved, just a firm commitment to making things work for the sake of the child.

Sam says: "You have to be so careful about everything you say and do - you have to keep on good terms and resolve problems really quickly." And as Rob adds: "It's essential to create some sort of stability and routine."

Sam and Rob, who've been living together for about three years, began to explore the possibility of starting a family two years ago. Rob, 35, says: "We were in a situation where things were much more stable for us. We were an established couple and wanting children was really the next step." Initially Sam wanted to get married, although he laughs at the idea now, and they have both considered some sort of commitment ceremony, although Rob squirms slightly, knowing how cheesy that sounds. "I've seen it done so badly before - it's a taste issue really."

Sam, now 36, has wanted to be a father since his early thirties. "Before that it was a case of, 'yes, I'm gay so I suppose I won't ever be able to be a parent'. Then I began to realise that it could be possible because of what was happening in the States - surrogacy and adoption. So it opened up a lot of

emotional desires to have a kid."

They rapidly discovered, though, that as a gay male couple, most avenues for parenting were firmly closed to them. In this sense, lesbian couples have a lot more choice if they wish to start a family. According to Stonewall spokeswoman Anya Palmer, only very few gay male couples have opted for co-parenting - partly because it's so difficult to organise. "It's something that lesbian couples find it far easier to do. They can use an individual donor or opt for co-parenting."

According to Stonewall's research, one in six gay women has children, compared with one in 10 gay men, but the figures include children from previous heterosexual relationships. For male gay couples who wish to start a family from scratch, the numbers are negligible, partly because gay couples can't adopt - it's still illegal under the 1976 Adoption Act - although single people can. "It's a travesty," says Palmer. "And from the child's point of view it isn't ideal."

So Rob and Sam realised that if they wanted to be parents at all, they would have to compromise. Rob says: "Originally we'd have preferred to have done this as a couple. But there's absolutely no other way of doing it." After a series of long discussions with Kate they agreed on a 60/40 split of financial and parental responsibility; looking after the child for six days spread over a fortnight. Sam is going to start freelance work so he can enjoy more flexibility. All the co-parents plan to spend birthdays and Christmases together, as well as the odd Sunday lunch and picnic.



United we stand: But according to Stonewall, only one in 10 gay men has a child
Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

Not that this should make any difference to the child's upbringing at all, according to psychologist Charlie Lewis, who has researched fatherhood over the last 18 years. "There's no evidence that there'll be any ambiguity about roles if the parents are gay. The point is that all parents reinvent patterns. That's what's creative about parenting, especially now that we're so detached from our extended families."

This could be even truer for gay couples, who can't rely on their own parents' support - moral or otherwise. As Sam says, "The parent has to get their head around having a gay child but then when it becomes gay-child-having-baby, it's more difficult to handle." Sam's mother, who lives in the United States, has been extremely supportive, while Rob is bracing himself to break the news to both his parents.

"It is scary because I sense disapproval", he laughs warily. "You always want to be approved of by your parents and once you show them something alternative you want them to react positively to it."

In terms of their own peer group, Sam says his straight friends are, surprisingly more tolerant about the whole venture than his gay friends. "So far we've had more resistance from our gay friends - some gay men wonder why we're buying into the established culture, the norm," Rob adds. "Most of our straight friends have kids and think it's a brilliant idea, especially in our situation, because we'll have time off every few days. They're quite envious - they think we've got the best of both worlds."

In those first few meetings, they hashed through every aspect of the venture; gauging each other's thoughts on schooling, health and politics. It comes across as a curiously business-like experience, until you realise that it can't really be approached in any other way. "It's quite odd", says Sam. "It's not like any other relationship that would begin and then develop. You're immediately starting out with the idea, 'okay, we

might make a baby of this'. You're trying to leap ahead across so many hurdles."

One of the bigger hurdles was choosing who should be the biological father. Originally it was going to be Sam but after some tests it transpired that Rob had the higher sperm count. "It was DIY" explains Rob. "Kate used one of those plastic syringes at home. It worked like a dream," he beams.

Sam, meanwhile, found that

whole period grueling. "At first I did feel differently that it was his sperm. I had real problems with it. I went through a really depressing time partly because my need to biologically reproduce was far stronger than I realised. My dad is dead and a lot of that was tied into it." Now, though, he seems quite happy that Rob is the biological father. "It's quite nice because I love Rob so much. Knowing that it's part of him makes me love the

child even now - in a way that I wouldn't feel initially if I was an adoptive parent." When the time comes, says Sam, they will tell the child who the biological father is. But we'll also say that the reason he's here is down to all of us.

Still, Sam is aware that his role will be pretty unique, if not a little confusing at first. "I'm starting to appreciate how adoptive parents feel and estranged parents too."

Snowboarding: is it a sport or the new rock 'n' roll?

It's the coolest thing on the piste at any rate. Alister Morgan reports on an Olympic phenomenon

FIRST it was someone getting caught using marijuana. Next came the news that another participant had wrecked his hotel room. Twenty years ago, you'd have assumed this was the behaviour of the members of a rock band. Today these are the antics of sportsmen - the exponents of the hippest winter game around - snowboarding.

The sport achieved notoriety last week when the Canadian snowboarder, Ross Rebagliati, was stripped of his gold medal at the Winter Olympics in Nagano, after testing positive for marijuana. A successful appeal meant he was allowed to keep his medal, but not before rival Austrian boarder, Martin "The Terminator" Freinademetz was expelled from the Olympic village. His Olympic accreditation was withdrawn after a party at his hotel, when equipment was damaged and there were reports that a snowmobile had gone missing.

"We had a party, we had fun, something got broken, it's not cool, but it happened..." Freinademetz told reporters on Thursday.

These antics did nothing to deter the crowds at Nagano,

with more than 10,000 watching the sport's inaugural appearance.

Snowboarding is far more than a spectator sport, however. Estimates suggest snowboarders will outnumber skiers within the next 10 years. It's an extraordinary achievement for a sport which did not exist 30 years ago and in the Eighties was still banned from many ski resorts. Today, with an estimated 5 million converts around the globe (60,000 from the UK), it is increasingly challenging the traditional Alpine supremacy of skiing.

So what had made this sport the coolest activity on snow, and the hottest thing at the Winter Olympics? Sure, its followers love its adrenaline-inducing qualities, but the whole lifestyle that goes with it, from the camaraderie of the snowboarders



to the clothes, are what have attracted young people to the peaks.

At first glance, snowboarding and skiing do not appear too dissimilar, but crucially, snowboarding derives from surfing

and skateboarding - not skiing.

Like surfers, snowboarders are usually younger, (23 on average) and live a tribal existence, travelling from country to country in search of the best snow. Snowboarding is broken

down into four categories: Duel Giant Slalom; Boardercross (similar to a motor-cross track with snow); Big Air & Style (competitors launch themselves off a snow ramp and perform acrobatics in mid-air); and the Halfpipe (inspired by skateboarding, in which the competitor gathers speed and rides bank to bank performing tricks).

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) endorsed two disciplines, but many boarders reject the notion of a sport altogether. To them snowboarding is a "lifestyle".

21-year-old Melanie Leand is the current Women's Halfpipe champion and is also a convert from skiing. "I enjoy skiing, but snowboarding is so much more unrestricted," she says. "You don't have any poles, just a great feeling of community among snowboarders, and

I just love being in the mountains. It's just you and the mountain; there's nothing else quite like it."

Rebagliati's positive test for marijuana will not have surprised anyone connected with snowboarding. Olympic snowboarders are no more likely to take drugs than any other athlete, but the sport is inherently social. When participants habitually meet at the end of the day they are just as likely to drink, and experiment with drugs, as any other group of young people.

The advent of snowboarding has essentially brought a clash of cultures between two generations (Freinademetz used to compete in a gorilla suit. He gave that up but still retains his bleached blonde hair, goatee and eyebrows). As recently as five years ago many ski resorts

banned boarders from their slopes, but snowboarding's ability to attract big money has altered perceptions.

Sponsors are falling over themselves to be associated with a growing sport whose protagonists are young, vibrant and highly marketable. While the minimum equipment (exclusive of clothing) required for snowboarding includes a snowboard, boots and bindings which can cost between £500 and £1,500, countless urban youths, who will never see the top of a mountain are spending hundreds of pounds of snowboarding jackets, trainers, sunglasses and other bit and pieces.

So while TV viewers around the world marvel at the creativity of the Olympic sport, and debate the ethical implications of Rebagliati's case, businessmen are merely rubbing their hands.

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Fabulous Butcher Boy

Like the central character in his latest film, Neil Jordan would rather not grow up. Nick Hasted asked him why

IT WAS the voice Neil Jordan recognised first. Insistently innocent, ultimately terrible, it was a voice he couldn't have invented, but it suited him like skin. It was the voice of the Butcher Boy, Francie Brady, a voice heard first in the head of Irish writer Patrick McCabe. *The Butcher Boy* was his novel, and Jordan didn't want to direct it. But when he started to work on its screenplay, he found he had no choice. The voice wouldn't leave him. He'd grown up hearing it, after all. "It's the voice of rural Ireland," he says, "the surreal pleasure in the ordinary you used to find there. I grew up in Dublin, not the country. But I knew that child's voice so well."

Jordan is sitting in the Soho office where he began his *Butcher Boy*. He talks quietly but with an even rhythm, looking out of the window absently. He's been around a long time, but his magical, complicated visions haven't wavered. There are sticky-sweet sensations in *Night in Tunisia*, the 1976 collection of short stories which made his young name, which linger still, attitudes in his first, impressionistic novel, *The Past*, which surface in the sweep of *Michael Collins*. All his films are dreams, false memories. The sensuous fairytale landscape of *The Company of Wolves* seeps into the London of *The Crying Game*.

The Butcher Boy may be the first time the source of those dreams has been reached. It's set in the Ireland of the early 1960s. Its young boy, Francie, talks to the Virgin Mary and to allens, to fish in the river and to his best friend. It's an imaginative world so rich that, when his best friend abandons him, it bursts his banks, bloodily drowning the "real" world around him as he seeks vengeance on his neighbours. It's the Ireland Neil Jordan grew up in.

"One of the reasons I wanted to do the movie was to reinvent that world," he says. "I remember that mental atmosphere so well, the mixture of innocence and savagery, the strange cruelties. At school and at church, you were told about realities that had nothing to do with the world around you. You were told that God spoke to you personally. When I was a child, I spent half my time in a world that was not real at all. I remember being told at school that when God wanted priests, they just heard his voice. He said, 'I'll choose you', and there was nothing you could do about it."



Neil Jordan: 'It's a story of repression of emotion, of cultural deprivation, of people who can't even say they love each other'

"I wandered around for two years with my hands on my ears in case I heard that voice saying, 'Neil'. It was like being connected to another world. These things are very real to a child. Ireland wasn't really penetrated by the outside world until the late Sixties. It was a place outside time in a way, a preserved world. It was a world of madness, actually."

It was a world of more than religion. Francie's acquaintance with the Virgin Mary is no more real to him than the American horror comics he devours, or the science-fiction films he sees. Francie makes no distinction. He's lost in a world of wonder. So was Jordan. "The church's imaginative realities could be transferred to Dracula. To *The Twilight Zone*," he remembers. "Stuff you saw on television."

"When the Virgin Mary appears in the film, I thought about using a theremin, so she'd sound like a spaceship landing. You tend to live in that world when you're a kid. It's hard to remember it exactly

now, and I don't want to go on about it. I don't want to caricature that time. I didn't want to in the film."

The character whom Francie most resembles is the boy in Volker Schlöndorff's film of Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*. But where that child stops growing, standing for the suppressed horror of the Nazi Germany he's born into, Irish Francie seems to swell with the repressions of his town. It's as if he's the id of Ireland, freezing at the Sixties' start.

"It is a story of repression of emotion," Jordan agrees. "It's a story of people who can't even say they love each other until they're dead. That's very true of the Ireland I know. But it's true of other countries, too. Look at the United States. No matter how many therapists you go to see, they don't teach you how to deal with your own feelings."

Francie himself represses almost nothing, except the desire to grow up. He keeps his child's world of games and dreams pristine, until his inno-

cence ruins him. It's this personal suppression, this desperation, that Jordan identifies with most deeply of all. "He actually refused to believe that his world of childhood certainties would end," he says with animation. "I remember feeling that so clearly. We grew up near a big old Guinness estate that went to ruin, so when I was a kid I was in its trees every day. I'd be Robin Hood. I remember when kids' tastes began to change at 10 or 11, when they didn't want to play any more. I remember not wanting to do that. I just wanted to run around in my Robin Hood costume. And then you end up in the tree on your own, and you say 'Where have they all gone?'"

Was he like the boy Francie in other ways? "The boy who plays him looks the spitting image of me when I was that age," he chuckles. "His face is so huge! But he's from rural Ireland, and kids grow up pretty fast there. I thought the language in the script was so bad he might be upset, but he said, 'No bother'. So he starts acting

and the stuff coming out of him was so extraordinary I had to ask him to stop - 'Ya spermy little bastard!' It's down-home rural stuff. I wasn't like that. I grew up in the suburbs of Dublin. I read and I scribbled."

In the decades since, Jordan has never completely lost that attachment to boyhood. It's no wonder that, in all his dealings in the compromised, "adult" world of Hollywood, he seems hardly to have been touched. He still thinks of himself as a marginal character, just as he did when I first met him, before the release of *The Crying Game* gave

him his first Hollywood success. He's since made *Interview with the Vampire* and *Michael Collins*, major releases. Surely he's been tempted, along the way, to change his nature?

"I just want to make independent films," he says. "The *Butcher Boy* is a Warner Brothers movie, so the conversation is absurd. But whether it's a small movie set in Ireland or London or a big studio movie, I want to make it with the same spirit, the same freedoms."

The Butcher Boy is released on Friday 20 February.

A WEEK IN THE ARTS DAVID LISTER

SOME SCORN has been poured on poor old John Prescott because he decided, after his dousing at The Brits, to stay doggedly on so that he could watch Fleetwood Mac. Had he hung on wet and furious for Shola Ama or All Saints, the cynics say, he might have redeemed at least a little street cred for New Labour. But Fleetwood Mac?

As it happens, I'm with Prescott on this one. From where I sat at last Monday's show, Fleetwood Mac gave the best set not by a whisker but by a mile, and the London Arena can rarely have seen so many people of all ages up and boogie-ing as during that all too brief 15 minutes or so.

The state of middle-aged rock, even for those hands that do not possess the ever-ethereal Stevie Nicks, remains reasonably healthy as far as live performance goes. What is more puzzling, and a lot more interesting, is the state of middle-aged rock writing. The Stones' new album is actually rather good, but does not contain a true classic. Paul Simon's new musical is his worst album ever. Paul McCartney's latest signals a renaissance, but he also has not really delivered for years. Pete Townshend and Ray Davies, writers of English eccentricity, whose songs captured both the optimistic spirit and the neuroses of an era, seem to have given up.

It's a massive irony that live performance, which was supposed to limit the lifespan of rock 'n' rollers, still sees the big names playing big arenas. Yet composing, which makes no demands on waist or hairlines, finds them wanting. Roger Daltrey of The Who once told me that he was disappointed that all pop composers can deal with young love, but none had tackled the subject of middle-aged angst. He was particularly disappointed, he added, that The Who's composer, Pete Townshend, had not tackled the subject, a subject that would have appeared made for him. Townshend in turn told me that he and his

contemporaries had a youthful energy in the Sixties which was now gone.

It's true that most rock and pop composers seem rooted in their first subject matter, find it unsuitable and virtually throw in the towel. I've never really understood why. In no other musical form, from opera to jazz, are writers redundant in their middle years.

They are often on the verge of their greatest works. And even if they find the neuroses and occasional joys of middle age inappropriate, why can't the pop composers simply continue with the subject matter of their youth? There should be no reason why Paul McCartney couldn't write "Penny Lane" now. But somehow we don't expect him to, and he doesn't expect himself to either.



I think there is a sense among the writers that the medium is no longer appropriate for them, leading to a sense of insecurity. That struck me when I received a phone call recently from a polite chap saying he ran a band, it was about to go on a tour and could I give them a plug? Which little garage outfit was this, I wondered wearily? "We're called Fairport Convention," he said helpfully. The architects of British electric folk should be a lot more sure of themselves. So should all our middle-aged songwriters. As far as street cred goes, a great new song is worth more than a dozen jugs of water poured over a Cabinet minister.

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THE WEEK ON RADIO ROBERT HANKS

STANLEY Kubrick is supposed to have banned screenings of his film *A Clockwork Orange* in Britain after a copycat killing. As yet, however, recorded incidents of extreme violence inspired by radio drama are thin on the ground, and the picture is unlikely to be changed by last Saturday's adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange* on Radio 4. The problem for radio violence is partly one of emotional intensity - seeing blood being inevitably more disturbing than hearing about it. Even more importantly, though, it's a matter of sheer comprehensibility: thumps and gurgles, the suggestive chorus of faulty plumbing that stands in for most forms of assault short of a gunfight, are too unspecific to be much help to the listener.

Of course, comprehensibility can be overrated - some of the best radio plays are ones that are prepared to let go of clarity and nuance every so often, if it means boosting action and emotional realism. But in this case there were too many imponderables going on. John Hardy's electronic soundtrack, thumping and glooping away in the background, competed with dialogue spoken largely in Nadsat, the future slang Anthony Burgess invented for the book - a complex jargon which on radio reduces every conversation to a matter of squally muskrats in the upchuck and noddying the flabials.

The net result was that, to begin with at any rate, it was hard to make out anything much, except perhaps the splash of metaphorical bathwater swiftly followed by the splat of a figurative baby. Adding oc-

casional translation only served to set the listener's zoohies, or teeth, on edge and obviat, or kill, the pace and authenticity.

Later, as the ear adjusted, things improved, but only to leave you wondering if Burgess's original is all it's cracked up to be. Every imagined future is bound to pale besides reality when it eventually arrives, but some wear worse than others. It's symptomatic of Burgess's failure that he based Nadsat on Russian, apparently in the hope that it would not date. As things have turned out, it has dated extraordinarily badly - no one would now think that Russia could ever compete with the United States as a centre of teenage culture, and the very idea fixes *A Clockwork Orange* firmly in its Cold War context.

The same dualism blunts the novel's moral: in the person of Alex, the vicious teenage thug with the passion for Beethoven, Burgess projected a fairly clear-cut choice between moral freedom with all its attendant evils, and goodness achieved at the cost of individual will. He seems to have been unprepared for the cosy blandness that has overtaken civilisation - where *Heaven and Hell* is the title of a Radio 2 documentary about Joe Jackson, and where all the threat and beauty is smoothed out of music by Brian Kay's leechlike tones. At least Kay in person is more tolerable than Petreoe 'Irelandney, who last week spent Brian Kay's *Sunday Morning* speculating on what Brian might be up to on his holidays in New Zealand. Radio rarely inspires violence, but this came damn close.

TOMORROW IN THE SEVEN-SECTION

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY



Actress Emily Watson talks about the unusual men in her life

PLUS:

- Love and duty - the Duke of Windsor's own photographs of the abdication crisis
- Calvin Klein exclusive - a peek at the latest collection with Kate Moss and Christy Turlington
- The humble British cheese-and-pickle sandwich takes Paris by storm

The King's favourite: Mrs Simpson



'Stop frame' sequences of photographs are a feature of Edward and Wallis's Fort Belvedere album, assembled during cinema's first golden age. These are the first images in the album of the couple alone together

Wallis's loving slave buckled her shoes and painted her toenails

Newly discovered photograph albums, whose contents are published here for the first time, give an intimate picture of Edward VIII and Wallis Simpson's life at the time of his succession as king. It was a period, writes Paul Vallely, when their unconventional, if affectionate, relationship was the talk of high society

It was early in 1934 that Thelma, Viscountess Furness, decided to travel to New York to see friends. A few days before she sailed she invited her friend the American socialite Wallis Simpson for lunch at the Ritz.

"Oh Thelma, the little man is going to be so lonely," Wallis had said. The "little man" was

EDWARD'S PRIVATE SOUVENIR 1934-36

The private pain of the Abdication: Three pages of pictures in The Independent on Sunday tomorrow

Edward, Prince of Wales. Lady Furness was the latest in his line of mistresses.

"Well, dear, said Lady Furness, "you look after him while I'm away". She did. Indeed, as Thelma acidly observed in her memoirs, she "looked after him exceedingly well."

Until that point there had been nothing improper about Mrs Simpson's relationship with the future King Edward VIII, the man who was later to become for her sake the first monarch in British history willingly to abdicate. She and her second husband Ernest, an American-born shipping broker, had met Lady Furness through a friend at the US embassy four years before. Through her they had come to know the Prince of Wales and in 1932 had become regular, if infrequent, weekend visitors at his country home, Fort Belvedere. By 1933 the Simpsons were regulars at the staff at the Fort as regulars. In return, they often invited him to their daily cocktail parties at their apartment in Bryanston Court behind Marble Arch.

But when his mistress was in New York, Edward began calling in at Bryanston regularly and lingering so long past the cock-

tail hour that he was invited impromptu to join them for dinner. Often he kept them up until 4am. At first, a stoical Mr Simpson, whose business was in trouble and who had brought work home with him, sat and smiled. But as the royal visits became more frequent he began to excuse himself and return to his study leaving his wife and the prince alone into the small hours. "Ernest has cried off a few," Wallis wrote on 12 February 1934 to her Aunt Bessie in the US, "but I have had to go on. I am sure the gossip will now be that I am the latest [of the prince's mistresses]". Yet she always insisted that no affair took place.

At the Fort during weekend parties it was noticed that Edward danced more and more frequently with his American friend. "But I always have Ernest hanging round my neck, so all is safe," said Wallis.

Thelma Furness did not agree. She had lingered for two months in New York - where she had seen much of the rakish young Prince Aly Khan - and when she returned and Edward invited her to the Fort she found her lover polite but very distant. Then at dinner she noticed that the Prince and Wallis seemed to have developed little private jokes. When she saw Wallis playfully slapping the Prince's hand when he picked up a piece of salad with his fingers the penny dropped.

The viscountess was not invited again. It was the talk of the town. "Our little Prince is not so nice," one titled Chelsea lady said. "His treatment of Thelma and Freda [Dudley Ward, a previous mistress] is appalling. Just overnight - bang! No letter, no nothing. Just silence." But Wallis suddenly found herself in receipt of invitations from all directions by people who hoped that she would come - and bring the Prince of Wales with her.

By now the Simpsons were expected every weekend at the fort, and every week they had to assume that several evenings would be spent in the prince's company. What Ernest thought of it all is not recorded. Wallis told Aunt Bessie in one letter that Ernest was flattered by the prince's attention. It seems he had little option. At Fort Belvedere it was now Wallis Simpson who planned the

menus and rearranged the furniture. While the prince and his friends played golf, Wallis walked the prince's pugs, Cors and Jiggs. So touched was he by her affection for his dogs that one afternoon he turned up at Bryanston with a Cairn terrier under his arm - for her. They named him Slipper, and he became an important symbol of their relationship; the dog is much in evidence in the photographs we reprint today from the second of

Edward's private albums which have been passed to The Independent by a family friend who was given the collection by Wallis, then Duchess of Windsor, in 1972 when Edward died in exile in France.

In the summer of 1934 Edward invited the Simpsons to join him in Biarritz. But Ernest was to be away on business and so the prince suggested she should bring her Aunt Bessie instead. She did and it took the older

woman no time to realise that the prince was in love with her niece. She could see it, she told Wallis, "in his every glance". When Wallis replied that she was in control of the situation, her aunt warned, "I can see no happy outcome to such a situation."

Her niece did not want to hear. Her relationship with the Prince was the stuff of fairy tales for a woman such as Wallis, who had been born out of wedlock and brought up as the fa-

therless poor relation of two distinguished American families. Though she moved in Baltimore social circles and married an American naval aviator, Earl "Wheeler" Spencer, her first marriage was unhappy. Spencer turned out to be a moody, violent alcoholic who used to go out for the evening leaving her tied to the bed. After five years of unhappiness she divorced him. The next year she married the safe and sentimental businessman Ernest Simpson,

with whom she moved to London. She was not young - she was 35 when she met Edward - and she was not pretty. Nor was she rich, well-educated, clever or witty. And yet she had become the favourite of the heir to the throne of England.

Many have assumed that the attraction was sexual. Some historians have claimed that when her first husband was posted to gunboat patrol duty in the South China Seas, Wallis joined



Tea on the terrace at Fort Belvedere: From the early stages of her love affair with Edward, Wallis Simpson took the role of a dominant mother to his supplicant son

moves to the heart of Edward's life



The swimming pool Edward built at Fort Belvedere was at the centre of his and Wallis's growing domesticity



By the time of Edward's succession, Wallis Simpson, one of the most elegantly dressed women of her time, was the hostess at Fort Belvedere, on the edge of Windsor Great Park, where they kept a playful photographic record which includes chats on the doorstep, their dog Slipper playing with a frog, and an impish image of the prince in Garter breeches



him in Hong Kong, where he took her to one of the colony's singing houses, a high-class brothel in Repulse Bay. It was there, and later in Shanghai, it was said that the future Duchess of Windsor learnt the sexual skills, including the celebrated "Singapore Grip" in which contemporary gossips said she was expert. In later years, as Duchess of Windsor, she re-

peatedly asserted that there had been no sexual relationship at this point, though the evidence from Edward's hutler was that his bed was often unslept in from the end of 1934 when Mrs Simpson was staying. Be that as it may, it was clear to their contemporaries that the relationship between Edward and Wallis fed something deeper in his personality than his re-

lationships with his earlier mistresses had. It was no adult love affair of an ordinary sort. "It was overwhelmingly a mother-son relationship," according to Michael Bloch, editor of *The Letters of Edward and Wallis (1931-1937)*. "His letters to her are infantile, adoring, trusting; they plead for affection and protection. Hers to him are sensible, affectionate, admonishing,

possessive. The correspondence resembles nothing so much as the letters exchanged between a fond but wise parent and a lonely, hypersensitive child at boarding school."

The role-playing that Edward found exciting made him, in the words of the diarist Chips Channon, Mrs Simpson's absolute slave. He buckled her shoes and begged for cigarettes

like a trained poodle - even in front of the servants. One servant once entered the room to find Edward on all fours, painting Wallis's toenails. Edward pretended to pay her for her kindnesses in cash and jewels, even bestowing upon her Queen Alexandra's emeralds which had been destined for his future Queen. ("If she were what I call a respectable whore,

I wouldn't mind," grumbled a sullen Prime Minister, Stanley Baldwin. Wallis punished his smallest misdeed like a schoolmistress, literally rapping his knuckles or rebuking him sharply. In their later years Edward's golfing partner Sandy Bertrand recalled how the Duchess often said: "Sandy, you are so kind to play golf with my old man - it must be so boring for you."

Whatever the truth about the relationship it was clear that by the end of 1934, when the prince wrote the first of many

love letters in his copperplate hand, he had fallen deeply in love with Mrs Simpson. He knew it was different from his previous relationships and before long he knew that he wanted to marry her. It was not, of course, something he knew how to discuss with his father. Before he could work out how to do that, George V died and Wallis's lover was proclaimed King.

Listen to Australia, look at Holland: get on your bike, Ma'am



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The Australians have done it: why can't we? Not become a republic, which they have not, yet, despite yesterday's big step in that direction. But why can we not have a grown-up debate about how we ought to be governed, in the way that they have? Why can we not have an intelligent debate about, for example, why the hereditary principle is wrong when it comes to choosing members of the House of Lords but right for selecting a head of state?

The Constitutional Convention in Canberra voted yesterday by 73 votes to 57 that Australia should cut its umbilical cord – its constitutional link with the Queen. The decision, which is likely to be ratified by a referendum next year, will set off a wave of revision throughout the Commonwealth which surely cannot stop until it has washed through and over the Palaces of Westminster and Buckingham.

Once a British statesman talked about calling in the New World to redress the imbalances of the Old. In the Eighties the Australian courts did just that in the *Spycatcher* affair, forcing even Thatcherite Britain to regret the excesses of executive power. Here is another chance for Oz radicalism to shame us into the modernisation of our Parliament

and the prerogatives of the Crown.

Last year, thanks to Labour's rapid delivery of election promises, the Scots and Welsh tasted the fruit of direct decision-making about their constitutional future; Londoners have their day in May; all of us, sooner or later, will need to assent – or not – to British participation in European monetary union. Those decisions, all of them important, do not exhaust the agenda of change. Conventional wisdom says people are uninterested in constitutional change. But listen to the way people talk about the Royal Family, let alone the House of Lords, and about the relevance of politics to their daily lives. It is nonsense to say the British are essentially wedded to what was.

Since the death of the Princess of Wales there has been an intermittent conversation about royalty and its rights. Tony Blair has counselled the Queen and her heir about their behaviour – with the clear implication that unless they become more user-friendly that rumbling mood of discontent so palpable in the week after Diana's death might turn nasty.

One result is the new-found willingness of the Queen's household to open its books to public inspection. And yet few fundamentals have changed. It is not just the continuing penchant of the



Prince of Wales and his mistress for engaging in a sport detested by large numbers of his subjects. It is the way that word – subjects – has not been challenged and subverted. The monarch remains the signer of our laws, at the apex of a system of pre-democratic government. What the Australian experience

underlines, however, is that the debate starts to be both more difficult and more fruitful when alternatives to a monarchy are considered. Support for a republic dropped sharply in the Canberra Convention, while remaining a substantial majority, once it was forced to choose between a constitutional monarchy and the most popular system for choosing a president. The idea that will be put to the Australian people in the referendum is that the president should be appointed by agreement between the prime minister and the leader of the opposition, and approved by parliament. This has offended the democratic purists who think the holder of the post should be directly elected. But it is not a bad idea. As Andreas Whitam Smith argued in these pages last week, it is only when you are forced to think through the alternatives that they can really be judged.

And in our situation, which is quite different from Australia's colonial past and Asian future, there are positive features to a hereditary monarchy. The answer to the objection that it is inconsistent with abolishing the rights of hereditary peers to speak and vote in the Upper House is that they perform different functions. The hereditary principle should be taken out of law-

making; it has, however, a kind of legitimacy when it comes to choosing a symbolic and unifying figurehead.

But that means reforming our monarchy, being clear about what it should and should not do. The last vestiges of royal prerogative should be abolished. The monarch should not have the power to choose who shall be prime minister when the party balance in the House of Commons is uncertain. The paraphernalia of castles and palaces and country houses and titles should be trimmed or justified, and the same goes for the taxpayers' subvention. On the other hand, the Royal Family should use its prestige to promote the values and causes which bring us together as a nation, much as Diana tried to do. There is a balance to be struck between the Royal Family preserving its dignity and showing that it is in touch with the lives of its fellow citizens.

Monarchists tend to mock such attempts to modernise the rather recently invented pageantry of royalty by saying that we would not want a bicycling monarchy like that of the Netherlands, would we? Well, we would, actually. The message to the Queen that the Australians should give us the courage to deliver, in the politest possible way, is: on your bike.

LETTERS

Save the arts

I am writing to support your campaign for the arts and in particular your call to make it simpler for individuals to set donations to charities against their tax bills.

This government has the admirable ambition of reversing decades of centralising state power and giving some power back to the people. Its intention not to raise the burden of taxation is consistent with that ambition. So how to finance the growth of the arts? The Government is in part urging museums and galleries to become more enterprising and to raise more money themselves.

The Academy is alone among major arts institutions in not receiving a penny of state money, and so we have experience on which to draw. The Academy charges for entry; it was first in the field to get major sponsorship from corporations and one of the first to set up membership schemes for friends and for corporations. We have done all the things others are now gearing up to do. And still there is a gap between all this income and our expenditure.

We have just reported an operating surplus for 1997 of £175,000 after a deficit the previous year of £1.4m, and a good part of the reason was a scheme for individual giving, the Exhibition Patrons Group, for individuals giving over £5,000 each. We are just about to widen this scheme to individuals giving a minimum of £1,000. But, my dear, the complications of ensuring that we do not risk the wrath of two sets of tax authorities.

Customs rules mean that any benefit, worth even £1, would make an entire donation of £1,000 subject to VAT. The donation would then be worth only £850 to us.

The Inland Revenue do allow some benefits to be offered before a donation ceases to be tax-effective, but there are different rules for covenants and gift aid. Rules on the latter are particularly crazy because a donor can only receive benefits up to 2.5 per cent of the gift subject to an absolute ceiling of £250; try explaining to a donor giving £1m that the gift is tax-ineffective.

The financial impact of these rules is huge. This year the Inland Revenue ruled that we must refuse payment for Friends' membership by deed of covenant and had to withdraw tax reliefs of £178,000; the same value as our operating surplus.

People who give usually like to get something back, and it is difficult to explain that a benefit cannot be promised, and the institution can be left looking mean or stupid. The incentive of a simplified tax break will encourage more individuals to give more money.

DAVID GORDON
Secretary
Royal Academy of Arts
London W1

The Museums & Galleries Commission (MGC) welcomes *The Independent's* campaign to save the arts. In particular we were interested to read your suggested changes in taxation policy. The MGC has already made a submission to the tax authorities, responding to the



Fighter for the arts: the statue outside the Royal Academy in London of its first president, Sir Joshua Reynolds

Photograph: Nicola Kurtz

Chancellor's review of charity taxation, and called for a number of reforms.

Our response calls for even stronger tax breaks for the arts and heritage. We want to see tax relief on donations to all museums registered with the MGC, not just charitable museums and galleries. All donations to the arts, however small, should qualify for tax relief and we want simpler and fairer rules on so-called "benefits" from donations, to avoid individual and corporate donors being discouraged from making donations by inappropriate tax rules. We also believe that major donors should be able to give assets, such as paintings, instead of cash, and obtain relief.

In addition the MGC has made several recommendations to reduce the VAT burden currently experienced by the museum sector. We are now waiting for the Government to publish its consultation document on the charity tax review before making further representation on this issue.

VANESSA HARRIS
Head of Finance and Administration
Museums & Galleries Commission
London SW1

Your campaign for US-style tax incentives on donations to the arts could lead to a loss of income to Oxfam of £3.5m a year, the cost of our development programme throughout central Africa.

Tax-efficient giving is a great incentive to donors. Oxfam is one of many charities which currently derives much of its voluntary income from large numbers of people covenanting valuable but small monthly amounts often as little as £2. Under current arrangements the tax benefit is claimed by the charity. It seems unlikely that the proposed system will result in all small-scale donors going

to the trouble of completing self-assessment tax forms to reclaim tiny rebates perhaps as little as £7.17 per year.

While we understand and sympathise with the crisis in the funding of the arts, confining these tax changes to arts organisations could significantly skew current patterns of charitable giving by diverting money from voluntary organisations which are also facing similar funding pressures. In theory, we might in time be able to increase income from wealthy donors, already using self-assessment, to compensate for any loss we would suffer, but this is completely untried. Other charities will face similar challenges, and could see their incomes affected over time.

These proposals raise complex issues which require extensive and careful consideration across the voluntary sector. They should not be rushed through in a Budget now only weeks away.

DAVID NUSSEBAUM
Financial Director
Oxfam
Oxford

Strike on Iraq

As an agency devoted to justice, peace and development the Catholic Institute for International Relations deplores the present escalation towards military action against Iraq.

Our development programmes in the region are still dealing with the damaging effects of the war in the Gulf in 1991. For its neutral stance at that time Yemen, the poorest country in the Middle East, suffered severe economic deprivation, which greatly affected its capacity to develop. Up to one million migrant Yemeni workers in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf were expelled from their places of work. Many of the long-term migrants were homeless, and destitute and set up shanty towns on the outskirts of the

coastal city, Hodeidah, stretching already under-resourced health and social services beyond their limited capacity. The remittances from migrant workers, a mainstay of household economy, were lost, pushing many into poverty. Much western aid was cut off, and has yet to be fully reinstated.

If the bombing of Iraq goes ahead the implications for development in the region are severe. The human cost and the infrastructural damage could be immense. The standing of Britain and of UK-based development agencies will be greatly damaged.

We urge the British Government to listen to the countries in the region, to listen to their European allies, and to the peace and development agencies here, to use its "special relations" with the US to persuade them to look seriously for negotiated solutions to the present crisis.

DENIS HAWES
Catholic Institute for International Relations
London N1

Having invoked the authority of the imaginary "international community", the United States will soon unleash its own, very visible, weapons of mass destruction, to punish the Iraqi regime for daring to resist being treated like a colony.

In the past, such use of force by a western superpower against a Third World country would have been called imperialism; these days it is called peace-keeping. As with the former Yugoslavia, the West now claims the moral authority to interfere with the affairs of those regimes it deems

"mad" or "evil", where the West is always the good guy, trying to enforce "sanity" and "order" on hellfire and childish nations.

I care little for Saddam. But my thoughts will be with the Iraqi people.

JJ CHARLESWORTH
London N16

Personality mayors

London-based journalists such as David Walker see elected mayors as a way forward for cities because they judge the success of local government only by the example of London ("Elected Mayors could give personality to local government", 11 February).

The real issue is that there is no London-wide government. In cities like Birmingham, however, the City Council is able to take strategic decisions to secure the future wealth and well-being of the city, while at the same time devolving power to local level for truly local issues.

Personality politics is attractive to the media because it provides personality copy. Local government is not show-business but the business of governance and ensuring the provision of services that have a massive impact on people's day-to-day lives.

THERESA STEWART
Leader of the Council
Birmingham City Council

The answer to David Walker's question "When was the last time you heard a reference to council affairs in Albert Square or The Street?" is: yesterday! "The council" has featured heavily in *Eastenders* over the last couple of months as a con-

sequence of Ian Beale's attempts to have himself elected.

PAUL SWEETMAN
Southampton

Sinn Fein victory?

The exclusion of Sinn Fein from the Stormont talks on the basis of two disputed killings, when for weeks the RUC had evidence of UDA involvement in the killing of nearly half a dozen nationalists before the Ulster Democratic Party was even considered for exclusion, will appear to the majority of the nationalist community as unjust and as a flimsy pretext for the exclusion of many of their political aspirations from the process.

This will raise the question of whether the SDLP supports this exclusion and place it in the position of either having to do so or move closer to Sinn Fein's position. Do the two governments want to hand Sinn Fein electoral success against the SDLP on a platter?

J P MURPHY
Birmingham

Lords and Commons

Your leader of 12th February seemed to be saying: "The House of Lords does not work in theory, but it is disturbingly effective in practice. The House of Commons works in theory, but does not work in practice. We therefore recommend that the House of Lords should be reformed urgently."

This reasoning seems to be perverse. Would it not be better to see the reform of the House of Lords in the context of the whole of Parliament, especially of the relationship between the two Houses?

Meanwhile, it is clear that government intends to remove hereditary peers' right to sit. I hope you will encourage Mr Blair only to do so if he substitutes for them an alternative that is at least as independent.

As for the present House, I hope it will continue to exercise its independent judgement in monitoring the great power of this government without being intimidated by threats of reform or abolition. I, however, grudgingly, I am glad to find, admit we are not doing a bad job.

VISCOUNT CRANBORNE
Leader of the Opposition
House of Lords

Death of marriage

I enjoyed Glenda Cooper's piece on marriage "fixers" (10 February). It reminded me of the very intimidating lady who organised a cousin's wedding in New York some years ago. She described herself proudly as a "nuptician". "As in mortician?" I asked somewhat incredulously. "Yeah, I guess so," without even a hint of a smile.

JOHN SCOTT MONCRIEFF
Edinburgh

QUOTE UNQUOTE

In truth, there is nothing remotely funny when our Deputy Prime Minister has a bucket of water thrown over him in a grubby little stunt perpetrated by a grubby little lout – Ann Widdecombe, Tory MP

I have never seen such a tidy sleeper as Peter Mandelson. His hands were neatly placed on his thighs. His mouth was closed, his hair remained immaculate – Linda McDougall, wife of Labour MP Austin Mitchell, after witnessing the Minister without Portfolio slumbering on a train

It's better to send middle-aged men abroad to bore each other than send young men abroad to kill each other – Robin Cook, Foreign Secretary

I am incredibly good at tailoring. If a woman wants to get rid of her bust and hips, I can do it – Antony Price, dress designer

Left-handed women are more likely to win qualifications, to be elected to public office and to take part in public speaking. They even reach puberty 15 months earlier than right-handed women – Bob Worcester, MORI chairman

Every now and then you gotta do one for art – Peter Falk, actor, who plays the TV detective 'Columbo', after being signed up to star in a new Arthur Miller play

We must act. The threat posed by Saddam's arsenal is terrifying and real



ROBIN
COOK

WHY THE WEST IS
TALKING TOUGH

The *Independent*, in a critical front page leader column and articles by Robert Fisk and Patrick Cockburn, on Thursday, challenged the Government to explain its position on Iraq. I would like to accept that challenge.

There is nothing fuzzy about the threat that Saddam Hussein poses. Nor are the biological and chemical weapons he has developed the invention of comic book writers. They are real. Terrifyingly real. Ask his own people.

It was why the United Nations, as part of the Gulf War ceasefire, insisted on his allowing UN weapons inspectors into Iraq. Saddam agreed to allow them free access both to destroy his weapons of mass destruction and his capability to develop more in the future, as he is obliged to do under Security Council resolutions.

We will hold him to this because the reality is far worse than was known when the Gulf War ended. Despite almost daily Iraqi obstruction and deceit, Uncom - the UN weapon inspectors - have uncovered 38,000 chemical weapons, 480,000 litres of live chemical weapon agents, 30 chemical weapon warheads, 48 operational missiles and six missile launchers.

Iraq claimed, until faced with the evidence in 1995, that it never had a biological weapon programme at all. But Uncom

has discovered a massive plant dedicated to producing anthrax and botulinum toxin. Uncom found 19,000 litres of botulinum toxin. Victims die of paralysis within a week. They found 8,400 litres of anthrax. Four out of five people infected die within a few days. They drown in their own body fluid. A kilogram of anthrax released in a city could kill tens of thousands of people.

But Uncom believes there is much more still to be found and destroyed. They have evidence that Saddam still has thousands of tonnes of chemical weapons hidden. They believe he still has the capacity to manufacture quickly tonnes of biological weapons. And they know that all missiles and warheads are still not accounted for.

No one can doubt he is prepared to use them because he has done in the past against both his own people and his neighbours, as Robert Fisk has so graphically described. His regime is based on brutality. His human rights record is horrific. He is kept in power solely by force. And he has shown he is ready to use that same force against neighbouring countries.

We can't simply sit back and do nothing to stop him increasing his stockpile of weapons and the means to deliver them. Doing nothing is not an option.

But we are not trying to humiliate Saddam. We are not seeking more control over

Iraq. All we are demanding is that he gives Uncom the guaranteed right of access and inspection that he agreed in 1991.

Uncom must have the unfettered access necessary to enable it to do its job. That includes access to Saddam's presidential palaces. They are not just lavish homes built at the expense of the suffering of his own people. They are huge military compounds - one of which is 25 square kilometres in size - which contain weapons and documents that Uncom must be able to inspect.

We are not in the business of risking lives for fuzzy symbolism or posture. We are not looking for conflict, nor do we want to launch a military adventure.

One-off inspections are not enough. Uncom knows from bitter experience that it is only repeat visits which have enabled them to uncover Saddam's weapons of mass destruction. So Iraq's latest compromise does not meet the terms of the UN resolution. It does show that Saddam can be moved. But only if diplomacy is backed by

the threat of force.

We are not in the business of risking lives for fuzzy symbolism or posture. We are not looking for conflict, let alone do we want to launch a military adventure. We are making every diplomatic effort to reach a solution. We have been for weeks. And we continue to work flat out with our partners to achieve this.

We are also in the lead in trying to help the Iraqi people. We are driving discussions at the UN to expand the oil-for-food programme. Britain is the second largest

donor of humanitarian aid to Iraq. But it is not the UN which is starving Iraqis. It is Saddam Hussein. There are no sanctions on importing food or medicine. Saddam simply prefers to spend the money he earns from exports of oil on his palaces and rebuilding his military machine.

But the history of our dealings with Saddam show that diplomacy alone will not pull him back from the brink. And in the end, it may require force itself to make him comply with international law. The aim of any military action would be to diminish Saddam's military capabilities, including his ability to deploy, conceal and recreate his weapons of mass destruction capability or threaten his neighbours.

Saddam should not confuse our reluctance to use force with our determination to do so if necessary. The risks are too great to turn a blind eye, no matter how comfortable that option may seem.

The stability of the entire region is at risk. As Tony Blair has made clear, we have a clear duty in the interests of long-term peace to stop Saddam defying the world community. He can not be allowed to continue to develop nuclear, chemical and biological weapons.

There is increasing recognition in the international community of the importance of making Saddam comply with the Security Council resolution. If force is needed to ensure Saddam does not have weapons of mass destruction, more and more countries accept that Saddam must take full responsibility. But the power to lift this threat lies in his own hands.

The writer is the Foreign Secretary.

When you consider John Prescott's encounter with Chumbawumba, the Sixties look oh so good



TREVOR
PHILLIPS
ON THE DAYS
OF SUMMER

The obituary writers worked overtime this week, but I fear that they have spent the greater part of their labours on a figure unworthy of their effort. As my good friend and sometime TV mentor Brian Walden has reminded us, heroics are in the eye of the beholder. His evaluation of Nelson Mandela was, to say the least, controversial. Knowing Walden's devastating capacity for rebuttal I hesitate to differ with him in public; I've seen him destroy too many in debate to enter into a dispute with him lightly. However in the case of Nelson Mandela, I might just enter a doubt. For my own money, he got the facts right, but missed the point. It doesn't matter much whether Mr Mandela has succeeded as a politician; that isn't his value. It would be like evaluating Mother Teresa as a failure on the grounds that she didn't do much for the science of disease control. These people are models and inspirations to the rest of us; that is

their purpose. So pouring cold water over them does little to dim their lustre; dare I say it, it may only make the pourer look as though he has missed the temper of the people.

When Danbert Nohacco approached the Deputy Prime Minister at the Brits this week, I doubt whether he had the sort of elegantly worked critique of the Labour government as Waldeo did of Mr Mandela. If he did, we didn't hear it. But he did have the same outcome in mind - to pour cold water over a People's Champion who, he thought, had betrayed the People. But Prescott is still thought of as the conscience of the Labour High Command; so it looks odd for a supposedly politically aware anarchist to pick him for the ice bucket treatment. He is the one person thought both inclined to and capable of keeping Labour to its historic mission of helping the less well-off against the will of the devious Blairite spinmeisters, even if it means displeasing the New Labour Rich (including millionaire pop stars). It doesn't seem frightfully bright. I think that Chumbawumba should stick to music, at which they are brilliant - "Tubthumping" should be the England World Cup anthem. The words are prophetic:

*I get knocked down
Then I get up again
You're never gonna keep me down...*

But stars should avoid the choosing of heroes; it is a complex business. What we can all agree is that great heroes embody the spirit of their times and in some way demonstrate



Surf's up: the Beach Boys helped set the optimistic tone of the Sixties

Photograph: Michael Ochs/Redferns

the best of which their era is capable. But who are they? Two contenders for greatness passed away this week; the commentators dwelt on one and ignored the other. They were wrong.

The passing of Enoch Powell unleashed acres of apologies for the great Tory opportunist; we heard that he was a brilliant scholar, about his intellectual rigour. We heard far less about the vulgar populism that inspired his most famous remarks, or about the coldly calculating way in which he rewrote that speech with the specific objective of encouraging a minority of thugs and racists, who then went out to do

precisely what he could have predicted with his fine professional mind: to intimidate as many black and Asian families as they could find. The defence that he was the only one courageous enough to raise the issue of racial conflict is fatuous. His speech was made in an attempt to break the hard-wood consensus for race relations legislation which had been arrived at only after four years of debate. His legacy is wholly ugly and malign. And of course, he was wrong in his central proposition that black, or multiracial Britons could never truly belong to the nation: from Mr Paul Boateng and Baroness Flather

in the Palace of Westminster, across to Trevor McDonald, Ian Wright and Scurry Spice, it would be hard to avoid the accepted presence of New Britons. There was a poignant irony that Mr Powell's own passing was reported to the nation, on TV by two black presenters.

Yet relatively little effort has been expended on analysing the impact of a far more significant figure who died this week, Carl Wilson of the Beach Boys. It will no doubt seem absurd to set a mere singer alongside the Great Intellect; but if there is a sound of the Sixties for me,

it is closer to the sweet harmonies and teenage lyrics of the Wilson brothers, than the adonoid grating of Powell's rhetoric. And it is this decade that even now forms the cultural substratum for leadership around the world: why does anyone imagine that Clinton and Blair are so close, but for their common cultural inheritance? Even John Prescott, possibly the least likely member of the present government to be thought of as a reconstituted hippy, really only turned up at the Brit Awards because he was desperate to meet Fleetwood Mac, yet another relic of the late Sixties and Seventies.

It is reported that, even in his wet suit, he stuck around purely for the pleasure of going backstage to meet the band, who, aside from the fact that Mick Fleetwood had left his hair at home, could easily have been back in the mid-Seventies.

The loss of Carl Wilson, from cancer at just 51 marks the end of a kind of summer. For 36 years, the three Wilson brothers, with their cousin Mike Love and their friend Al Jardine have toured the world carrying the sound of sunny skies and foaming surf with them. Even now people talk of the optimism of the Sixties; nothing expressed it better than the close harmonies of "Good Vibrations" and "Wouldn't It Be Nice", the songs on which Carl led. Few others could have got away with lyrics as apparently banal as:

*Putti Page,
And summer days on old Cape Cod,
Happy times, drinking wine
On my garage ...
... reality is not for me.
And it makes me sad,
Fantasy worlds and Disney Girls
Are coming back ...*

Yet even if you didn't know where Cape Cod was, the band cooed up an image of a place in which endless summer was possible; a golden gentle

summer, in which there was nothing to worry about except the surf, the girls/boys and the cars. Of course it wasn't real, but that is not the point of the artist, or of the visionary - it is to point us to a better world. The Beach Boys had their dark side, with alcoholism, Dennis Wilson's death in - of all things, a swimming accident - and Brian Wilson's deep depression. But even this they turned to new possibilities when they became the first of the superbands to plead the cause of the environment in their album *Surf's Up*.

To people who did not live through this period, it might seem sentimental to lavish this kind of praise on a bunch of Californian surfers. But their sound was pervasive and imitated by others; it became, for a while the language of pop music. The point is that though they were not seen as a "political" band in the sense that even the Beatles were, they gave a generation a sense of optimism and the feeling that a better world was there for the taking. That seems to me a marvellous legacy. And set against the crude, vulgar gesture politics we saw at the Brits, it feels as though the summer's nearly over. Today's popular culture, all hard-edged cynicism, points to a cold-hearted future.

Get out of the way. That woman boxer's really mad - she's got PMT



GLEND
COOPER
LAME EXCUSES
OF OUR TIME

There are only 685 days to the Millennium. We are in the last days of the 20th century, which has seen more advances than any other age, particularly in the area of gender equality. But in case women fall victim to complacency, remember the British Board of Boxing Control.

In an ongoing industrial tribunal hearing to determine whether Jane Couch, the British-born welterweight champion known as the Fleetwood Assassin, has suffered sex discrimination, the BBBC came up with a peculiarly novel explanation for denying her a licence to fight in her own country: PMT.

Advisers called by the BBBC made clear to the tribunal in Croydon, south London, that women and pugilism just don't go together because the poor dears' menstrual cycle gets them all silly and upset. If they boxed while premenstrual - for goodness sake - they might hurt themselves. As opposed to any other time of the month?

A letter from the board read out at the tribunal made clear this was true: "Unfortunately many women suffer from PMT when they are more prone to accidents. They are more emotional and more labile (unstable), which makes them more prone to injury."

One really has to conclude that this men's enclave, the BBBC, doesn't know too much about women. As far as I can see, premenstrual women would make far better boxers than women on an even keel who might realise how stupid this sport is.

Naked aggression, the desire to hit anything that gets in your way, the single-minded conviction that life is unfair and everyone is going to pay sounds like a recipe for success in the boxing world to me. You don't like the way your opponent's looking at your hair? Wham! Your partner is a low-down dog with the social niceties of a caveman? Bam! You don't really know what's bothering you but the world's a terrible place and it all seems to be going wrong for you? Kapow! The referee is holding up your hand and you have won the match. It's all so simple. Instead of studying the form ardent gamblers would be making 28-day calculations and promoters would be furiously arguing about the dates of matches.

Still as Dimah Rose, the lawyer representing Jane Couch, pointed out, this is not the first time that men have come up with unusual excuses to justify why women shouldn't do things. "It is like when they told women that they couldn't run marathons because their wombs would fall out," she said. Another finding that has been seized upon by men is that women's brains shrink during pregnancy. Dr Anita Holdcroft hit the headlines a year ago as the scientist who'd proved what the man in the pub always knew - pregnant women really were a few cans short of a six-pack. Dr Holdcroft's paper said the brains of pregnant women appeared to shrink during late pregnancy, which offered an explanation for cognitive problems some women complain of before and after giving birth. The newspapers rejoiced. "Health warning: having a baby can shrink your brain", one headline screamed. "Just as we thought. Pregnant women do lose their minds" proclaimed another. Curiously, a

study says that age shrinks men's brains faster than women's. However that study, which proves that advancing age does indeed make men smaller-minded, has not been widely followed up. Maybe the memory loss had already set in ...

Other things women have been banned from doing over the years include voting - women were bound to be pacifists and the Empire needed manly and masoch governments. Playing football was also frowned on - breasts would get in the way. And as for becoming a nightclub bouncer - well Jackie Winn in Bristol was told she should think about being a barmaid instead.

Only two years ago in a parliamentary debate on equal opportunities *Hansard* records that Sir Anthony Grant said, "I am wholly and absolutely in favour of equal opportunities. Women often do a much better job than men, except in rugby, but in virtually everything else they do an extremely good job ... I hope I do not live to see the day when the English ladies' 15 beats the English or Scottish men's 15." Don't we all?

To be honest anyone who decides to box needs their head examined. But if the BBBC is going to suggest that women become emotionally unstable and vulnerable during periods then I'll buy it. Just don't expect me to go near a cooker. I might hurt myself on the nifty hot hob. Or indeed damage myself with a sharp fruit knife due to my increased chance of being prone to injury. Maybe I'll just stay away from the weekly shop at the supermarket in case I become emotionally unstable with the till girl. I'll stay on the sofa, watch television and let men do dangerous things like looking after children. PMT? I'll have it all month thank you very much.

Looking good
in bare essentials

Celebrate with me tonight.
I'm a brunette my body is
smooth, and best enjoyed in
a see-through number.
Reply Box 149



FOUNDERS
FLAVOUR WORTH FINDING

Dominique de Menil

DOMINIQUE and Jean de Menil were a young couple with a growing family when they moved to Houston in 1941. They had spent much of the early war years apart, Jean in Romania, sabotaging rail deliveries to Nazi forces, Dominique with the children at the family home in the South of France.

Jean de Menil had come to Houston to establish Schlumberger (his wife's family firm) as an overseas company, independent of Vichy France. Over the next few decades, they were to amass one of the great private art collections in the world - some 15,000 pieces spanning 4,000 years. Meanwhile, they had become equally interested in the ecumenical movement and the cause of human rights around the world.

Dominique was the daughter of Conrad Schlumberger, the French inventor who, with the financial backing of his father and in partnership with his brother Marcel, had spent more than 20 years perfecting the electronic logging device that would transform oil exploration around the world, and gradually build the enormous family fortune.

The Schlumbergers had no interest in art. They were scientists and inventors. Dominique was brought up in Paris and took graduate and postgraduate degrees in mathematics and physics at the Sorbonne. She met her husband, Baron Jean de Menil, a banker, at a party in Versailles; he joined Schlumberger a few years after their marriage in 1931.

In New York in the early 1940s, the de Menils met the Dominican Father Marie-Alain Couturier, who had brought the art of Matisse, Leger and Rouault into chapels in France. He became their guide and mentor. On one occasion they paid \$2,000 for a Cézanne watercolour and Dominique's mother was appalled: "Father, they will have to eat crumbs at this rate." "Better to eat crumbs than to live without art," was Couturier's reply.

The de Menils became insatiable. They borrowed money to buy art and they campaigned to bring art into the lives of others. They had found in Houston a small Museum of Fine

Arts with an excellent collection. As board members, building the collections and the professional staff, they urged that exhibits be advertised on city buses and billboards.

In 1951, as volunteers, they curated a Van Gogh retrospective in the new Contemporary Art Museum, set up by young enthusiasts (it had cost \$5,000 to build). The two young amateur curators travelled by train to bring back treasured paintings on loan. They included the famous *Portrait of Dr Gachet* (which, in the 1980s, fetched many millions at auction). The de Menils gave Max Ernst his first exhibition outside a commercial gallery. They built a large collection of the works of Ernst and René Magritte. With naturalisation in 1962, Jean became John.

In 1954, they established the non-profit Menil Foundation to foster knowledge and understanding in art, architecture and philosophy. Approached by the new Catholic University of St Thomas, they commissioned Philip Johnson to design the master plan for the campus, and went on to found an outstanding art department. They brought in Jermayne McGary as its chairman.

The university gained a reputation for the artistry of its exhibitions. When McGary died suddenly in 1964, Dominique de Menil took over. She became known for the imaginative and dramatic installation of her exhibitions - for example "Rhythme and Raison", paintings from the Menil Collection in 1986 at the Grand Palais in Paris.

In 1969 the de Menils founded the Institute of the Arts at



De Menil: insatiable

Rice University, Houston, expanded Rice's art department, and created a media centre, drawing in distinguished film directors like Roberto Rossellini to teach. Beginning modestly in 1960 they launched what became a major study of "Image of the Black in Western Art". It resulted in a massive international archive and a four-volume publication by the Menil Foundation and Harvard University.

Devout Catholics, the de Menils founded the octagonal Rothko Chapel in Houston to be an ecumenical chapel open to all. It opened in 1971. It was dedicated to meditation and peace, and is decorated with 14 large dark panels by the abstract artist Mark Rothko. There Dominique de Menil called together leaders of world religions for week-long colloquia. The Dalai Lama came. In 1978 and again in 1994 the Whirling Dervishes performed their graceful, haunting rites. Typically, in 1979 Dominique de Menil went to Turkey to visit them in their homes.

She became ever more vividly aware in her wide travels of atrocities across the world, and of the courage of those who countered them; in response she established the biannual Rothko Chapel Awards of \$10,000 to each of five recipients for their commitment to truth and freedom. She also founded the Oscar Romero Award of \$20,000, named after the El Salvador bishop assassinated at the altar in 1980. In 1986, with President Jimmy Carter, she established the Carter-Menil Human Rights Prize of \$100,000, awarded in Houston or Atlanta on alternate years. Archbishop Desmond Tutu gave the keynote address in 1986 and Nelson Mandela spoke at the presentation in 1994 when he was given a special \$100,000 prize. In 1984 a Carter-Menil award went to the Institute of Applied Science in Oslo for its efforts to bring peace between Israel and the PLO.

With John de Menil's death in 1973, Dominique de Menil began alone the task of building a museum to house their still growing collection. She chose as architect Renzo Piano, who with Richard Rogers had designed the Centre Georges

Pompidou in Paris, and said she wanted it to look small on the outside and big on the inside. It does. It opened in 1985 and has received consistent critical acclaim for its simplicity. Built with contributions from other Houston foundations including the Brown, Cullen and Hobby Foundations, the Menil Collection is open free to the public from Wednesday to Sunday.

Later the de Menils commissioned Piano to design a gallery for their art works by Cy Twombly. Twombly then added his own collection to the gallery's.

The Menil Collection is in the heart of what has become known as Meniland, a neighbourhood of 3.2 acres of land given over to 1920s and 1930s one-storey bungalows, which they bought in the 1960s and painted grey with white trim. Some bungalows are used for office space. The rest are rented, some to long-time residents, some to those who want to be a part of the art world. The Menil Collection stands comfortably amid them at one end, the Rothko Chapel at the other.

Dominique de Menil's last building project was the Byzantine Fresco Chapel. Originally painted in a small chapel on Cyprus, these exquisite frescoes had been hacked into portable hunks by vandals who later sold them. The Menil Foundation rescued them and had them restored on behalf of the Greek Orthodox Church. They are now sheltered in a small, exquisite chapel designed by the de Menils' son François.

Over the decades, as their private collection became well known throughout the art world, the de Menils were courted by the major museums of Europe and America, anxious as to where their collection might end up. But, Dominique de Menil reasoned, they had made their lives and their fortune in Houston - the centre of the oil industry. Therefore, the treasures must remain in Houston.

Marguerite Johnston

Dominique Schlumberger, arts patron and philanthropist; born Paris 23 March 1908; married 1931 Baron Jean de Menil (died 1973); two sons, three daughters; died Houston, Texas 31 December 1997.



The 'Nashville sound': Bradley, right, with Loretta Lynn, with whom he collaborated on *Shadowland* (1988)

Owen Bradley

THAT Nashville is the universally acknowledged centre of the country music industry is largely the legacy of one man: Owen Bradley. A former bandleader and sometime session pianist, he went on to become one of the architects of the famed "Nashville sound" and was responsible for developing the city's 16th Avenue South, an area now known as "Music Row", into the hub of the industry.

A native Tennessean, Bradley began his musical career in several 1930s dance bands, including that of Ted Weems, of "Out of the Night" fame. He developed his skills as a bandleader and arranger and by 1940 was music director for the Nashville radio station WSM, home of the *Grand Ole Opry*. His work gave him a unique relationship with the show's stars and when the Decca Records executive Paul Cohen was looking for a right-hand man in Nashville, he chose Bradley.

With Cohen based in New York, it was left to Bradley to adopt a hands-on role and he rapidly made Decca a major

player in post-war country music. Among the acts he produced were Red Foley, Kitty Wells, Ernest Tubbs, Webb Pierce, Brenda Lee, the Wilburn Brothers, Loretta Lynn and, for three 1956 sessions, Buddy Holly.

Although Bradley worked with rock 'n' rollers like Holly and Gene Vincent, he was among those wary of the detrimental impact of the new music on the country market. Their response was the so-called "Nashville sound", a slick, accessible and phenomenally popular approach to country.

Bradley's arranging experience proved useful, although he was as guilty of periodic heavy-handedness as were the sound's two other principal architects: RCA's guitarist-turned-producer Chet Atkins and Don Law of Columbia. At its worst the Nashville sound was soppy and cliche, but at its best it could be stunning, reaching its apogee in the work of Patsy Cline - particularly "I Fall to Pieces", "Crazy" (both 1961), "She's Got You" (1962) and "Sweet Dreams" (1963) - whom Bradley

had produced since her earliest days with Four Star Records.

Through Bradley's advocacy of Decca's "Faith" series (known as the 14000 line), acts like Tubbs, Foley and Jimmie Davis in the early 1950s made gospel recordings at a time when such projects were rare.

Bradley's first studio had been in rooms rented from the Teamsters trade union. An unexpected rent rise, however, led him to develop an alternative site on 16th Avenue which included the Quonset Hut studio. This action ruled out Decca's mooted move of its operation to Dallas and thus secured for Nashville its future status as Music City, USA. The Hut was later sold to Columbia but, by that stage, Bradley and his session guitarist brother Harold had developed their Bradley Barn studio complex 20 miles to the east at Mount Juliet. The Barn became a noted centre of production and Loretta Lynn, Conway Twitty, Jack Greene, Marty Robbins and Jerry Wallace were among those who recorded there under Bradley's

direction. It burnt down in October 1980, but was later rebuilt.

Having been promoted to A & R director in 1958 and vice-president in 1968, Bradley's career with Decca/MCA lasted into the 1970s, after which he worked on a freelance basis. Later projects included a two-album set with Kitty Wells for Step One Records in 1989 and Loretta Lynn's 1988 album *Shadowland*. Bradley also worked as music director on the Hollywood movies *Coal Miner's Daughter* (1980) and *Sweet Dreams* (1985), biopics of, respectively, Loretta Lynn and Patsy Cline.

A quiet and modest man, in 1974 Owen Bradley rightly received Country Music's highest honour, election to its Hall of Fame. His son, Jerry, is also a record producer.

Paul Wadey

Owen Bradley, musician, producer and record company executive; born Westminster, Tennessee 21 October 1915; married 1935 Mary Katherine Franklin (née son, one daughter); died Nashville, Tennessee 7 January 1998.

John Pinkerton

LAST month a 400-page book, *Leo: the incredible story of the world's first business computer*, was published in New York. The book celebrates Leo, a computer built by the British catering company of J. Lyons, and the most romantic of all the pioneer computing machines. John Pinkerton was chief engineer of Leo, and his career tracked the rise and turbulent progress of the British computer industry.

Pinkerton was educated at King Edward VI School, Bath, and Clifton College, Bristol. In 1937 he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, where he read Natural Sciences, graduating in 1940. His war years were spent on radar research. At the end of the war he returned to Cam-

bridge, as a research student in the Cavendish Laboratory.

In the immediate post-war years computers were in the air, especially at Cambridge University, where the director of the mathematical laboratory, Maurice Wilkes, was at the very forefront of development, building a computer known as the EDSAC. Pinkerton - who knew Wilkes from wartime radar research - took not much more than a passing interest in computers until he learnt of Lyons' computer developments.

The catering firm of J. Lyons was a national institution, famed for its high-street tearooms and bakery goods. In the business world it was also famed for its streamlined offices, which em-

ployed many hundreds of accounts clerks to deal with the sales of millions of cups of tea and countless cakes each day.

Lyons' interest in computers dated from 1947, when two of its senior office managers made an American tour to see what was new in the office world. They came back convinced that the way of the future would be computers, and set out to buy one. However, it would be five or more years before machines became commercially available, so they decided to build their own. Contact was established with Wilkes at Cambridge, who agreed to let Lyons make a copy of the EDSAC computer. Lyons also needed a chief engineer to build the machine, and Wilkes

pointed Pinkerton in their direction; he never looked back.

A natural engineer, Pinkerton's philosophy was not to change anything in the EDSAC's design which he did not fully understand; he later remarked, "Since we didn't understand very well why it was designed, we didn't make very many changes at all." In fact, Pinkerton made several key innovations, the most important of which was reliability. The 6,000-valve Leo was to function at the heart of an operational business and had to be available day in, day out, with no significant breakdowns. The techniques Pinkerton developed, such as the "marginal testing" of components that were about to fail, was classic engineering work that became standard industry practice.

Leo became operational in early 1951, and gradually took over more and more of Lyons' office routine. By 1954, it was used to capacity, and it was decided to build a second machine. Word of Leo had spread wide in the business community and several other firms, such as the Ford Motor Company, had expressed interest in having a machine too. So, in 1955 Lyons decided to go into the computer business and created a subsidiary, Leo Computers Ltd. Pinkerton became technical director of the new firm, and oversaw the development of Leo's successors, Leo II and Leo III.

By the early 1960s, with the

onset of American competition and the need to develop transistorised computers, the costs of staying in the computer business had begun to soar. Lyons made the sad but inevitable decision to quit while the going was good, and sold out to English Electric. Pinkerton was appointed head of research in English Electric Computers, but more reorganisation lay ahead.

In the mid-1960s, Harold Wilson's Labour government was determined to rescue British industry in general and the computer industry in particular. Bullied by the Ministry of Technology, English Electric Computers merged with the other major British player to form a "national champion" computer

firm, ICL, in 1968. The next 20 years were times of great volatility for ICL, as its senior managers constantly did battle to keep the company competitive against IBM and the American giants. For the remainder of his career until he retired in 1984, Pinkerton's principal role was as a product strategist, advising on how ICL's computers should anticipate and evolve with the ever more rapid shifts in technology.

After his retirement, Pinkerton was an independent consultant until his sudden death. He was editor of a series of professional computer books, and was editor of ICL's respected research journal. He was a lively member of the Guild of Information Technologists,



Pinkerton: a natural

and worked hard for its apprenticeship scheme.

Martin Campbell-Kelly

John Maurice McClean Pinkerton, computer engineer; born London 2 August 1919; married 1948 Helen McCorkindale (one son, one daughter); died London 22 December 1997.

BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS

DEATHS
YUDKIN, Cicely (35), died peacefully at home on 12 February. Cremation at Golden Green Crematorium, Hoop Lane, on Monday 16 February, 1.30pm. No flowers please. Donations to Macmillan Cancer Relief, 15 Britten Street, SW3 3TZ.

MEMORIAL SERVICES
HORDER, Mervyn, Mozart's Requiem, Saturday 14 March, 3pm, St Augustine's, Kilburn Park Road, Maida Vale.

Announcements for Gazette BIRTHS, MARRIAGES & DEATHS (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorial services, Wedding anniversaries, In Memoriam) should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephoned 071-292 2000 (24-hour answering machine 071-292 2001) or faxed to 071-292 2010, and are charged at £4.50 a line (VAT extra). OTHER Gazette announcements must be submitted in writing (or faxed) and are charged at £10 a line, VAT extra. Please include a daytime telephone number.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS

Prince Edward attends the opening of the new Royal Naval School of Maritime Studies at HMS Gower, 11am. No 7 Coldstream Guards mounts the Queen's Guard at Horse Guards, 10am.

Changing of the Guard
TODAY: The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 11am. No 7 Coldstream Guards mounts the Queen's Guard at Buckingham Palace, 11.30am. Band playing the Coldstream Guard's MOROCCO. The Household Cavalry Mounted Regiment mounts the Queen's Life Guard at Horse Guards, 10am.

Birthdays

TODAY: Prince Hans Adam II of Liechtenstein, 53; The Right Rev Michael Ball, former Bishop of Thuro, 66; The Right Rev Peter Ball, former Bishop of Gloucester, 66; Mr John Butterfield, MP, 57; Sir John Clark, former Chairman and Chief Executive, the Plessey Co, 72; Professor Evelyn Ebsworth, Vice-Chancellor, Durham University, 65; Sir Arnold Elton, consultant surgeon, 74; Sir Jack Kilbourn, former director, Central Statistical Office, 66; Sir Derrick Holden-Brown, former Chairman, Allied-Lyons, 75; Mr Kevin Keegan, footballer, 47; Mr Christopher Lillicrap, actor and musician, 49; Mr John MacGregor, MP, 61; Miss Marmela Maleeva, tennis player, 31; Miss Lois Maxwell, actress, 71; Countess Mountbatten of Burma, 74; Lord Newby, 45; The Hon Hamlyn Phillips, former Lord Lieutenant of Dyfed, 94; Mr Michael Rudman, theatre director and producer, 59; Dr Sir Albert Sloman, former Vice-Chancellor, Essex University, 77; Sir Jocelyn Stevens, Chairman, English Heritage, 66; Lord Wilson of Tillyorn, chairman, Scottish Hydro-Electric, 63; Mrs Margaret Wright, former Chief Commissioner, the Guide Association, 50.

TOMORROW: Mr John Adams, composer, 51; Mr Clive Aslet, Editor, *Country Life*, 43; Sir Nicholas Bayne, former High Commissioner to Canada, 61; Sir Harold Beley, former ambassador, 89; Sir William Bentley, Chairman, Society of Pension Consultants, 71; Miss Claire Bloom, actress, 67; Mr Dan Crompton, former Chief Constable, Nottinghamshire, 57; Mrs Chloe Davis, former Chairman, Consumer Affairs Group of National Organizations, 89; Sir Maurice Drake, former High Court Judge, 75; Mr Frank Dunlop, former Director, Edinburgh Festival, 71; Mr Paul Ferris, author

and journalist, 69; Mr John Greenway, MP, 52; Mr Gerald Harper, actor, 69; Miss Diana Jones, Jockey, 48; Professor Andrew Miller, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Stirling University, 62; Mr Charles Needham, former chairman, Coalite, 74; Sir Richard O'Brien, former Chairman, Manpower Services Commission, 78; Sir William Reid, former CIPD chairman, 67; Miss Jane Seymour, actress, 47; Miss Clare Short, MP, Secretary of State for International Development, 52; Mr Peter Squire, former Headmaster, Bedford Modern School, 61; Sir Adrian Swire, former president, John Swire & Sons Ltd, 66; Sir Alan Ward, a Lord Justice of Appeal, 60.

Anniversaries

TODAY: Births: Thomas Robert Malthus, economist, 1766. Deaths: Sir Pelham Grenville (P.G.) Wodehouse, 1975. On this day the Avonolath Khomeng pronounced a death sentence on the author Salman Rushdie, 1989. Today is St Valentine's Day and the Feast Day of St Abraham of Carthage, St Adolph of Osnabruck, St Antoninus of Sorrento, St Auxentius, St Conran, Saints Cyril and Methodius, St John Baptist of the Conception and St Maro. **TOMORROW:** Births: Jeremy Bentham, philosopher and writer, 1748. Deaths: Herbert Henry, Earl of Oxford and Asquith, statesman, 1928. On this day: Britain changed over to decimal currency, 1971. Tomorrow is the Feast Day of St Agape of Termi, St Sigfrid of Vercy, St Temo or Tamo and St Walfrid of Galford.

John Allenby

A Service of Thanksgiving for the life of John Allenby CBE will take place on Thursday 12 March at 12 noon in the Church of All Saints, Crondall, Farnham, Surrey. All are welcome.

FAITH & REASON

Lifelong fidelity: the source of this madness is in God

Is St Valentine's Day a saint's day or just a pagan hangover, an ancient festival of courtship? asks Margaret Atkins. Is there a distinctively Christian ideal of love?

It may all be a great mistake: it may be the wrong St Valentine. When the poet Chaucer told of the birds choosing their mates on St Valentine's Day, he described not mid-February, but May.

And for the new and blissful summer's sake Upon the branches full of blossoms soft. In their delight they runned themselves full of. And sang: "Oh blessed be St Valentine, For on this day I choose you to be mine!"

Chaucer, it appears, knew of a different St Valentine, whose feast was in early May. Could it be that the spring frolics of his poems were later attached, in error, to the other St Valentine's Day, in February?

That would make sense. What could be more natural than to celebrate courtship in May, when scented blossoms hang from the bough, when the hedgerows echo with birdsong, when

balmy evenings beckon lovers into the countryside? May, in most of Europe, looks like nature's own festival of fertility. Surely it is no coincidence that the pagan Romans commemorated Flora, the goddess of flowers, at this time. The roots of St Valentine's Day could be older than Christianity itself.

Historians tell us to be wary when we look for an unbroken link between modern and ancient festivities. The more history we discover, the more we learn how festivals are born and die, adapt and alter, to fit local needs and changing times. The point is important: but still... Surely here, if anywhere, in the fusion of human love with the first thrill of summer, we might be allowed to detect an ancient impulse quickening our modern veins.

Has Christianity, then, made any difference? Is the celebration of courtship simply a pagan thing, or is there a distinctively Christian ideal of love? We might look to fidelity: "for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part", as the marriage vows put it. But there is nothing exclusively Christian here. Think of Penelope, who spent 20 loyal years awaiting the return of her husband, Odysseus, from the Trojan War, warding off the advances of

her many suitors. And even today many a starchy-eyed Valentine dreams, however naively, of lifelong love.

Is there not a kind of insanity in this? It is all very well to declare everlasting love on a summer's evening; but, in the face of countless broken marriages and shattered dreams, how can anyone, in cold blood, dare such a thing? Romanticism is all very well; but it seems to have little to do with reality.

And yet - perhaps there is realism also in the romantic's dream. It is becoming ever clearer that divorce inflicts lasting damage on spouses, on children and on society at large, despite the honourable struggles of so many parents to soften the blow. The dream, in so far as it can be lived, protects us all, in concrete and ordinary ways.

"It is only Christian men / guard even heathen things," G.K. Chesterton once wrote. Chesterton always valued those good things which are shared by all human beings, of any faith or of none, things such as courage and laughter and poetry. These, he argued, although not specifically Christian, are most securely sustained within the framework of faith.

There is indeed a kind of madness about lifelong fidelity. But Christians, like Jews, find the source of this mad-

ness in God. God's steadfast love for his faithless people, Israel, was like a man's love for his adulterous wife; St Paul compared marriage to the love of Christ for his Church. Here, perhaps is the key to how Christianity might "guard heathen things". For Christ's love was above all a love that healed by forgiveness. In the bruised world of our everyday relationships, only forgiveness can heal; only forgiveness can restore and sustain fidelity. That is why the tidy, clinical, model of serial monogamy - a clean break with the wife, then marry the mistress - is not the Christian way. Divine forgiveness, by contrast, is thoroughly entangled in the messy reality of ordinary living.

As for February's St Valentine, we are sure of only one thing: that he was a martyr. Today's feast belongs to a man who was faithful to Christ even unto death. Perhaps, after all, he is an appropriate patron for lovers. In order to cherish our youthful dreams, we need the loyalty of a martyr no less than the laughter of May. It is as well that God, as the saying goes, writes straight with crooked lines. Out of our confused customs, the Church can rescue a feast that makes sense. And out of our broken attempts at faithful loving, a God-given forgiveness can bring healing and hope.

Small fry start to challenge the blue chips

MARKET REPORT



DEREK PAIN

There are signs, still faint, that second and third liners are shaking off their inferiority complex and narrowing the gap which has opened with blue chips.

In a week when Footsie tended to dilly and dally the supporting midcap and small-cap indices have achieved new peaks.

They were in form yesterday as Footsie managed a 29.8 point gain to 5,582.3, nearly 50 below the high hit last week.

One of the most astonishing aspects of the current bull run is the way blue chips have outperformed their smaller rivals. They opened a yawning gap which the smaller fry is unlikely to close in the foreseeable future.

Overseas investors are unwilling to venture beyond the Footsie constituents and even domestic institutions much prefer to concentrate on blue chips because of the difficulties they often experience in

trading in the shares of smaller companies.

Inchcape, the international trading group which was devastated first by the strength of the yen and then the Asian crisis, led the mid-cap advance.

The shares rose 10p to 161p in moderate trading. They have, of course, a long way to go before they recapture their earlier glory. Last year they topped 300p and in Inchcape's halcyon days were riding above 600p.

Coats Viyella, the struggling textile group, was another to stage a modest recovery. The shares managed to struggle off their low point, climbing 4p to 86.5p. CV has opted for a demerger. It intends to split itself into two stand alone companies.

Viyella and Jaeger together with the home-furnishing business will be bundled together as one group; the industrial threads and zips operation and small engine

neering side would represent the other package.

The dismal share price stems from its poor trading performance. The group took the gloss off the demerger announcement by producing a profit warning.

In 1996 it achieved £94.4m; around £40m is expected for last year and a dividend cut is on the cards.

Financial shares were back in favour, largely due to the storming Lloyds TSB profits performance. Lloyds gained 38p to 837p after touching 890p. Barclays and Woolwich, both reporting next week, improved 30p to 1,886p and 5.5p to 369p respectively.

Schroders rose 75p to 2,000 and Legal & General, the insurance group, 16p to 701p.

SEA MultiMedia suffered the day's biggest fall, sliding 40p to 7.5p. An agency cross of 900,000 shares in 2.5p did the damage. It seems a buyer could not be found at

higher price. An Israeli company SEA came to the market at around 70p in 1996.

Microfite, a technology group, fell almost as much as SEA. The shares slumped 5p to 7.75p after the group said it would have to sell its displays division because it was "experiencing financial difficulties". The sale could pull in up

to £3m. Two years ago the shares topped 70p.

Merrydown, the cider and English wine company, was another in a distressed state. After it was known the takeover talks with unidentified parties had fallen through the shares lost 7p to 47.5p.

Still, Tadpole Technology continued its remarkable progress, hitting 34.25p, up 7.75p. Since the stockbroker Colin Blackburn acquired 3.1 per cent at around 10p a share there has been a surge of speculative buying with many T-25 deals arranged. Tadpole, heavily loss-making, is rumored to have a big contract up its corporate sleeve. It will have to be a remarkable deal to justify the present price. Three years ago the shares topped 400p.

Futures Integrated Telephony jumped 18p to 95.5p after disclosing it had received a bid approach. Amin Hemani, who runs the Reading-based Westcoast computer

group, recently picked up 3.2 per cent and then a 4.27 per cent interest, said to be hostile to Mr Hemani. He was built through a nominee company.

ISA International put on 2.5p to 110p after buying a stationery wholesaler for £29m; shares are being issued for the deal at 137p.

Alphameric, the IT group, fell 8p to 38p. It produced a profit warning which prompted forecasts of around £2m to be lowered to no more than break even for the year ending next month. Butterfield Securities, the stockbroker, expect profits of £1.5m next year.

A telephone conference between hard pressed Biocompathies International and leading investors and analysts failed to produce much enthusiasm and the shares fell 3.5p to 149.5p. They were 1,420p last year.

Dares Estates improved 4p to 20.5 as a 6.2 million share overhang was placed with three institutions at 19p.

LPA Industries, an electrical equipment group, added 2.5p to 64.5p as stockbroker Greig Middleton described the company as "one to watch". The analyst David Wilkinson sees profits climbing from £557,000 to £900,000 this year and to £1.16m in the following year. LPA makes rail and aircraft electrical connectors. It has taken over Channel Holdings, another electrical connector business for £2.1m in cash and shares. GM say LPA has the muscle to make further acquisitions.

Total Systems, the IT group which has climbed from 30p since the Spring largely on the back of hopes of an MMT Computing bid fell 14.5p to 117.5p. Reason: MMT has sharply reduced its shareholding and now has only 2.6 per cent.

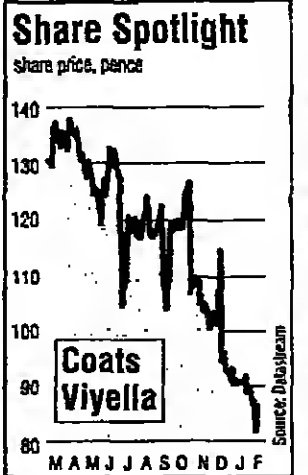
RNB Resources, a recruitment and training group, has risen 14p to 180p this week. The shares still look cheap in relation to other recruitment specialists.

TAKING STOCK

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Lloyds TSB set for acquisitions as bank reveals record profits

By Andrew Yates

Lloyds TSB, already one of the biggest banking groups in the world, yesterday said it was looking for more multi-billion pound acquisitions to add to its growing empire.

Its shares leapt more than 4 per cent to 873p as the group announced a 30 per cent rise in its dividend and record profits of £3.2bn in 1997, a rise of more than a quarter from the previous year.

However the bank faces a threat of strike action from BIFU, the finance union which represents three quarters of its staff, over impending mass job cuts and a new wage structure.

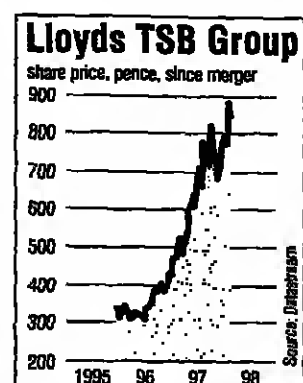
BIFU, the finance union, predicted that 10,000 jobs would be lost and more than 650 branches would close as Lloyds integrates its banking network with TSB. The union also believes that the bank's new wage deal will leave a fifth of the bank's staff without a pay rise this year.

Lloyds TSB has closed 153 bank branches last year with the loss of 3,300 staff. Overall the company cut 4,426 jobs during 1997. The bank is determined to continue its huge cost cutting program to fight off the threat of growing competition from anybody from supermarket chains to Richard Branson's Virgin group who have set up their own low cost banking operations.

Lloyds TSB indicated it had billions at its disposal to launch a major acquisition. Sir Brian Pittman, the group's chairman said:

"We are rapidly building up excess capital which we would prefer to use to make an acquisition. We are generating more than £1bn in surplus funds. There are lots of opportunities coming up over the next few years."

Lloyds TSB indicated that any purchase was likely to be within the UK financial services sector. Chief executive Peter Ellwood said: "We have already



looked at a number of companies, including a number of insurance companies."

The bank said yesterday that it was unlikely to launch a share buy back or give money back to shareholders until it has exhausted its acquisition possibilities. That is likely to be at least 18 months away.

Mr Ellwood admitted that the entrance of the supermarket into the banking market was a real threat. "I use the example of petrol. Within a few years the supermarket gained a 25 per cent share of the petrol market. At the moment are leading fig-

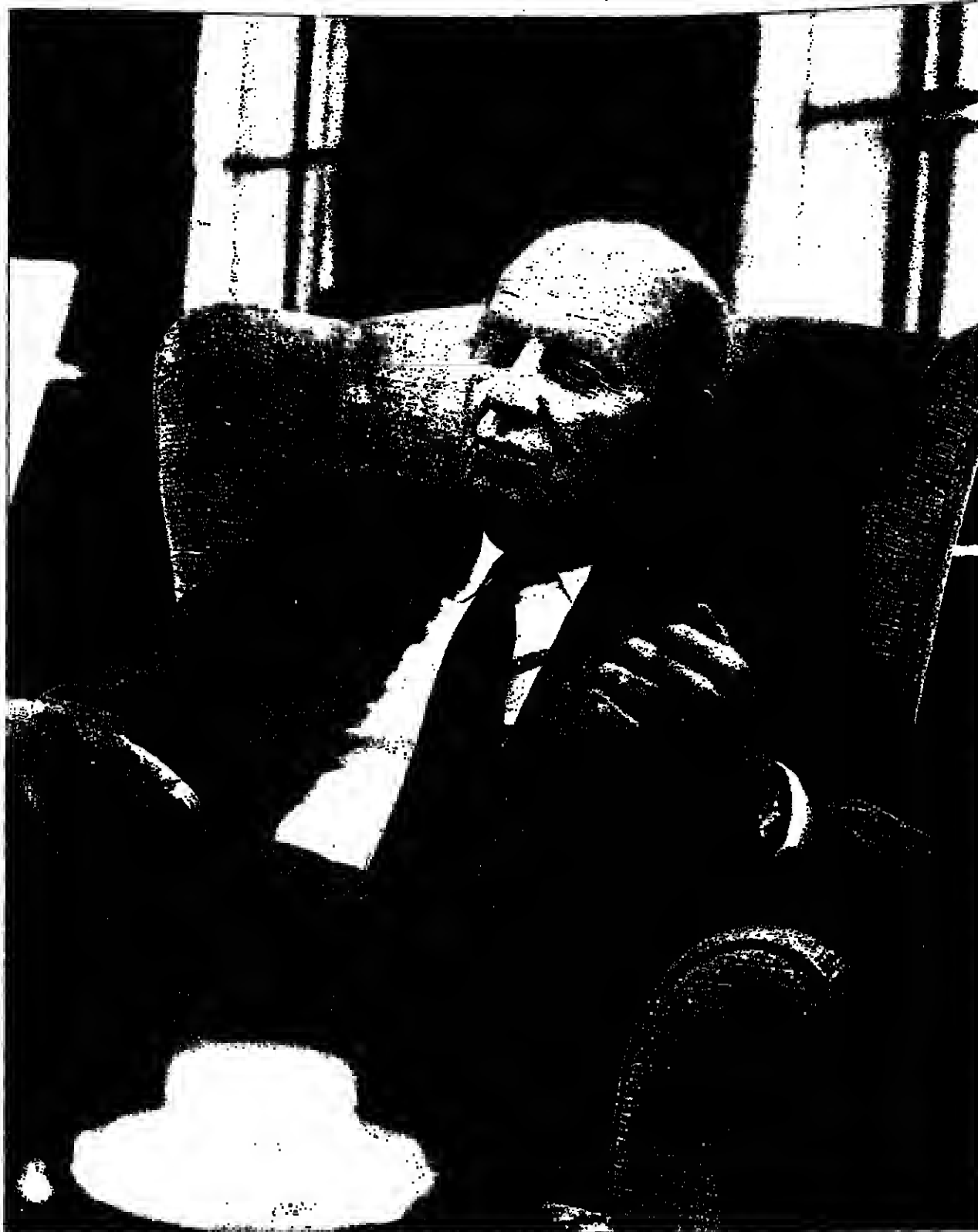
ures have gone up. However in the long term, banking margins will come under pressure. That is why we have to remain competitive and cut costs."

The group has already cut costs by £220m since tying up its £15bn merger with TSB. It plans to slash at least another £180m of costs over the next two years by integrating the two branch networks. The merger has been sanctioned by the House of Lords, but is still being considered by the House of Commons, a process likely to take several months. However the bill is understood to face opposition from several Tory MPs, including Alan Clark. A TSB Hill Samuel action group has been formed amid concerns that TSB will have to surrender a £1bn pension surplus to Lloyds.

If the cost cutting is allowed to proceed it would lead to a swathe of high street closures around the country amongst the groups 2,600 branch network. The group is also considering rebranding all its sites with the Lloyds-TSB name.

Lloyds TSB kicked off the banking results season in style, with its retail banking profits rising 16 per cent to £832m and mortgage earnings up a third to £693m. However the growth in the number of people taking out mortgages at the bank has slowed in recent months. Mr Ellwood admitted that intense price competition from building societies who have decided to retain their mutual status and give customers cheaper deals has contributed to sales falling away.

Outlook, page 25



Sir Brian Pittman: "We are generating more than £1bn in surplus funds. There are lots of opportunities coming"

KPMG and Ernst call off merger

By Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

Ernst & Young and KPMG dramatically called off their \$18bn (£11.25bn) accountancy mega-merger yesterday blaming "increasing difficulties" with the regulatory authorities. In a joint statement issued late yesterday afternoon, the two firms said the regulatory issues, together with the costs and resources required to merge the cultures of the two firms, "would have made the proposed merger impracticable."

The break-down of the discussions casts doubt on the other proposed accountancy merger between Price Waterhouse and Coopers & Lybrand. However, the two sides said last night that they were still pressing ahead and were in talks with the regulators.

KPMG and Ernst & Young, whose merger would have created the world's largest professional service firm, said the regulatory process in US, Europe and other major markets would have taken too long, proved too disruptive and incurred considerable costs. It would also have created potential disruption to client service, they said.

Both sides attempted to put a brave face on the collapse of their plans which were announced last October. Colin Sharman, KPMG's international chairman said that whilst he was "disappointed" he had no doubt that KPMG would emerge as "a stronger and more cohesive business." Nick Land, Ernst & Young's senior partner said Ernst & Young looked forward to continued growth both in the UK and internationally.

Accountancy insiders expressed no surprise at the collapse of the merger. Many had seen the proposed nuptials as little more than spoiling tactics designed to de-rail the PWC-Coopers deal which had been announced just three weeks before E&Y made its approach to KPMG.

A spokesman for Deloitte & Touche said: "Deloitte Touche Tomatsu has been opposed to consolidation among the Big Six because it is not in the interests of the profession and more importantly, because our clients have told us they are against it."

Argos chief vows to fend off £1.6bn GUS hostile bid

By Nigel Cope
City Correspondent

The new acting chief executive of Argos came out fighting yesterday, promising to mount a strong defence against the £1.6bn hostile bid from Great Universal Stores, whose offer document is expected on Monday.

Stuart Rose, who was only appointed earlier this week, said he was confident that Argos could confound its critics and escape GUS's clutches. "This is not a done deal at all. We have the makings here of a very strong fight. I'm up for it and I hope we will enjoy ourselves in the process. This business will not be sold on the cheap."

His comments came as Argos shares drifted 14p lower to 611p compared to the GUS offer price of 570p. The fall was attributed to fading hopes of a white knight intervention and comments from analysts that GUS may not have to raise its bid by much to clinch victory. GUS shares closed 2p higher at 750p.

GUS's offer document is expected to underline the views of Lord Wolfson, the company's chairman, that Argos is facing increased competition, increased demands for improved service and that GUS can help Argos achieve its home shopping and ambitions with far lower costs.

Mr Rose denied that after less than a week in the business, he could hope to offer little

more than a straightforward defence on the grounds of price and the possible return of funds to shareholders. "I have had enough time to get around the business and am very encouraged by what I've seen. This business has had just one difficult year. It is not about to collapse around our ears."

He admitted that the Argos management may have taken its eye off the ball in recent months. "There is a danger that when a business has been as successful as this one has that your eyes are sometimes not as open as they should be."

He said the company would continue with its plans to start a home shopping trial later this year. It is also possible that the company will consider developing a database on the shopping habits of its 14 million customers. "I have an open mind on it," he said.

Although Bob Stewart, Argos's finance director, last week questioned whether a database would be of much use to Argos, Mr Rose is thought to be interested in the possible uses of customer information for cross-selling of other products and the more efficient targeting of marketing material. "It would be timely to review our attitude to databases," he said.

GUS's offer document is likely to focus on the key points made in its original offer announcement and underline the weakness in the Argos share price.

GEC and Fiat win £500m Virgin tilting train order

By Randeep Ramesh
Transport Correspondent

GEC-Alsthom and Fiat have won Britain's largest ever train order, a £500m contract to supply Virgin with high-speed tilting trains for the West Coast Mainline.

The company beat off Siemens of Germany and Adtranz, the joint venture between ABB of Sweden and Daimler Benz, to claim the order. The 55 trains, each seven carriages long will travel at 140mph on the West Coast service.

The first trains should be in service by 2001. The joint bid

made by GEC and Fiat would guarantee up to 3,500 jobs at GEC-Alsthom's plants at Birmingham and Preston.

About 70 per cent of the work would come to the UK, with bogies, tilting mechanisms and body shells sourced from Italy and the remainder of the work, including final assembly, carried out in Britain.

The winning bid is based on Fiat's successful Pendolino tilting train, which has been in service in Italy for several years. Hames Sherwood's Great North Eastern Railways has also ordered two Pendolinos.

When the £2.1bn upgrade of the West Coast is finished in 2005, the trains will reduce the journey time from London to Birmingham to one hour while Manchester will be reached in two hours.

It is understood that other competitors could not meet the demanding production schedule. "What you had is the start date slipping ever closer to the delivery date," said one rival.

Siemens revealed last month that Virgin had insisted on onerous penalty clauses for late delivery amounting to some 30 per cent of the cost of the order.

Virgin has another large train order outstanding. The £250m train order for its CrossCountry franchise is being contested by Adtranz, Bombardier and CAF of Spain. Sources close to the deal say that the order is likely to result in a diesel tilting train fleet and that Adtranz and Bombardier are the "clear front-runners."

If Richard Branson, the chairman of Virgin, commits his company to the CrossCountry order - for 75 train sets - it would make him the "tilting train tycoon of Europe". Managers at Virgin have

been attracted by the huge time savings tilting trains would provide. Calculations suggest the twists and turns of many of CrossCountry's routes would see significant journey time reductions.

For example, the trip from Birmingham to Bristol, which can take more than one-and-a-half hours, could be cut by 30 minutes.

Tilting trains are expensive. Refurbishing CrossCountry trains would reduce the cost to about £180m and is understood to be among options submitted by the bidders.

Merrydown shares slump as takeover talks fail

By Andrew Yates

Shares in Merrydown crashed 7p to an all-time low of 47.5p after the troubled Sussex-based cider maker announced that potential takeover talks had come to nothing. Several rivals are understood to have run a slide rule over the group but decided against a bid, or were not willing to offer a high enough price for the group.

Merrydown is now looking to raise more money from financial backers or through an equity issue. However the group, which is struggling under a debt of £7.5m, denied it needed extra cash urgently to ensure its survival.

Andy Nash, Merrydown's new chairman, said: "We are restricted in what we can do with

our present finances to develop the business. We are in discussions with several parties about raising extra money."

The group plans to use the extra money to put behind its two main brands Merrydown cider and Schloer, the fruit flavoured soft drink. "Not enough money has been put behind our brands in the past and we want to increase our marketing and sales effort," said Mr Nash.

The group is also likely to implement more cost cuts. It recently reduced its workforce by more than 10 per cent. However, analysts raised concerns about the group's future. "The fact that the group was unable to attract a bidder says it all," said one City observer.

Merrydown, which produces Two Dogs lemonade, has suf-

fered from a slump in the alcopops market which forced it to give up the distribution of the drinks to Scottish & Newcastle.

Merrydown's shares have fallen from a high of 298p in 1993 and the group is now valued at just £5m. Even accounting for bid speculation the shares have underperformed the market by almost 60 per cent over the past 18 months.

Merrydown's problems culminated in Richard Purdey stepping down as the group's chairman after three decades with the group. Merrydown's failure to find a bidder is the latest setback for the troubled cider sector. Profits have also plummeted at Matthew Clark, which makes Diamond White and Dry Blackthorn, as it continues to lose market share.

Tesco beats rival with Norweb deal to plug into the gas market

By Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

Tesco laid down the gauntlet to British Gas yesterday by becoming the first big supermarket chain to offer discounted gas supplies to its 10 million customers who take part in the Clubcard discount scheme.

The UK's largest supermarket group has signed a deal with Energi, the domestic fuel brand launched last year by Norweb, United Utilities' electricity arm. Tesco Clubcard customers who register for the scheme before 1 May will receive 1000 bonus points, worth £10, if they sign up to switch from British Gas to Energi.

Mike Brindle, marketing director for Energi, said the scheme would also apply to

electricity customers when the domestic market finally opens to competition from the Autumn. The roll-out of domestic gas competition, which began in 1996, will be completed by 23 May under a controversial accelerated timetable from Ofgas, the industry watchdog.

Energi said Clubcard customers would get savings of up to 20 per cent on their gas bills, worth around £60 off an average £300 household bill. Details of the deal were confidential, although Norweb is funding customers' extra Clubcard points earned for every extra pound of their bills.

Several independent gas suppliers are thought to have courted Tesco and the other supermarkets to use their loyalty card databases. Tesco last

year looked closely at forming its own gas business, but is believed to have lost interest after adverse publicity about dubious doorstep sales tactics from other gas suppliers.

Tesco will send out the first Energi offers later this month to Clubcard holders, though under data protection rules they have to get in touch with the supplier directly to sign up.

Its choice of Norweb as its partner surprised industry experts yesterday, because Norweb has been slower than Scottish Power or Eastern Group to move into the gas market. However, Norweb said more than 120,000 of its existing electricity customers had signed up to take gas supplies when the market opens to competition on 27 February.

STOCK MARKETS

Index	Close	Change	Change (%)	52 wk high	52 wk low	Yield (%)
FTSE 100	5582.30	28.80	0.51	5675.10	4189.10	3.25
FTSE 250	4990.20	8.30	0.13	4998.90	4384.20	3.20
FTSE 350	2663.70	12.20	0.46	2668.20	2075.70	3.24
FTSE All Share	2595.85	11.24	0.44	2623.63	2066.07	3.22
FTSE SmallCap	2426.00	0.90	0.04	2426.20	2182.70	3.00
FTSE Floating	1317.40	1.10	0.08	1346.50	1228.20	3.43
FTSE AIM	1001.90	3.00	0.30	1138.00	865.90	0.97
Dow Jones	8348.68	30.43	0.36	8390.77	8356.79	1.66
Nikkei	16791.01	283.92	1.71	20910.79	14488.21	0.92
Hong Kong	10274.80	345.43	3.42	16820.31	7909.13	3.82
Dax	4502.48	34.35	0.76	4597.29	3171.05	1.76

INTEREST RATES

Short sterling	UK 10 year gilt	US long bond
1.00	6.10	5.50
0.90	6.00	5.40
0.80	5.90	5.30
0.70	5.80	5.20
0.60	5.70	5.10
0.50	5.60	5.00
0.40	5.50	4.90
0.30	5.40	4.80
0.20	5.30	4.70
0.10	5.20	4.60
0.00	5.10	4.50

Money Market Rates	Bond Yields
3 month 5.51	1 year 5.94
6 month 5.51	2 year 6.18
9 month 5.51	3 year 6.42
1 year 5.51	5 year 6.66
2 year 5.51	10 year 6.90

MAIN PRICE CHANGES
Inciscope 181.00 10.00 5.62
Smiths Inds 865.00 49.50 5.72
BBA Group 309.50 22.00 7.14
Bowthorpe 367.50 19.00 5.16

CURRENCIES

£/\$	£/DM	£/¥
£/\$ 1.6350 -0.24c 0.8808 +1.44p 204.95 +¥1.35 £ Index 104.80 +0.60	£/DM 1.5240 2.2397 201.62 \$ Index 97.80	£/¥ 0.0118 +0.13c 1.9225 +1.29p 125.35 +¥1.07 ¥ Index 108.70 +0.80
Pound	Dollar	

OTHER INDICATORS							
	Close	Chg	Tr Ago	Index	Chg	Tr ago	Next Day
Brent Oil (\$)	14.43	0.43	20.54	GOP	113.90	3.10	110.48
Gold (\$)	298.45	0.35	34.06	RM	159.50	3.30	115.40
Silver (\$)	7.08	0.08	5.12	Base Rates	7.25	6.00	

www.bloomberg.com/uk
Source: Bloomberg

TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.3487	Italy (lira)	2.861
Austria (schillings)	20.26	Japan (yen)	202.07
Belgium (francs)	59.51	Malta (lira)	0.6278
Canada (\$)	2.2955	Netherlands (guilders)	3.2488
Cyprus (pounds)	0.8429	Norway (kroner)	0.07
Denmark (kroner)	11.05	Portugal (escudos)	253.94
Finland (markka)	8.879	Spain (pesetas)	244.05
France (francs)	9.679	South Africa (rand)	7.7350
Germany (marks)	2.8944	Sweden (kroner)	12.94
Greece (drachmes)	457.26	Switzerland (francs)	2.3257
Hong Kong (\$)	1.517	Turkey (lira)	353.25
Ireland (pounds)	1.517	USA (\$)	1.5998

Source: Thomas Cook
Rates for indication purposes only



JEREMY WARNER
ON THE
COMING
CRASH IN
BANK SHARES
AND WHY
IT PAYS FOR
CAZENOVE TO
BE LOW PROFILE

Lloyds TSB may be too good a story to last

The story at Lloyds TSB under that old warhorse Sir Brian Pimman, just gets better and better. Long before it was fashionable to be so, Sir Brian was a shareholder value obsessive, for ever focusing on cost to income ratios, return on capital and risk management systems. While other clearers hared into the more glamorous world of investment banking, destroying hundreds of millions of pounds of shareholder value in the process, Sir Brian stuck to his knitting - the boring old world of financial services. The two cultures would never mix, he insisted and the one would just detract from the other. He was right.

Now all bankers, realising the error of their ways, sing broadly from the same hymn sheet. But still Sir Brian manages to whip the socks off them. Last year he delivered an astonishing 87 per cent return to shareholders, taking account of share price appreciation and dividends. For what was already one of Britain's largest companies, that's going it. Executives generally like to flatter themselves when they announce figures, but it's hard to quarrel with or pick holes in those released by Lloyds yesterday. They are stunningly good. There is no other way to describe them.

There must be some clouds on the horizon, so what could they be? With plenty of cost cutting still to come from the merger with TSB, prospects for Lloyds are still as good as any. If there are clouds, they are of a more general nature. In declining order I would list them thus. First, one of the factors driving the bank-

ing sector ever higher is the supposed further scope for consolidation. Personally I regard this as pie in the sky.

There is virtually no chance of regulators agreeing, at least in the foreseeable future, to further significant consolidation in UK high street banking. Unlike many Continental countries, with their plethora of regional banks, Britain is not overbanked. Actually, we have too few banks, their market shares are already high enough and their profits are at levels which already invite the description of excess.

Second, new low cost competition is building up as never before. Plainly that hasn't affected the market leaders unduly so far, but however they attempt to defend their position, it seems certain that banking margins will shortly be under severe pressure from new entrants.

The third cloud is a more intangible one. There is a general belief in the stock market that banks have kicked the old boom to bust cycle, that they have learned how to manage their lending in a manner which should prevent the full calamity of bad debt provisioning that has marked business downturns in the past.

There are plenty of good reasons for believing this may be true. Better management is one, but if governments genuinely are better at macro economic policy, then the peaks and troughs in the business cycle may be getting less severe anyway. Even so, it's going to take a long time to convince many of us that bad bank lending really is a thing of the past.

There's been too much recent experience of it to think that.

For all these reasons, the bull market in bank shares cannot be expected to last. Don't ask me to predict when it might end, however. As always, that's in the lap of the gods.

Cazenove, the City's oldest remaining independent stock broking partnership, has become so low profile in recent years that it would be easy to believe it might have disappeared altogether. In terms of publicity and vying for the public eye, it is so now far off the radar screen as to be virtually non-existent. So what's happened to Cazenove, arguably still, despite its lack of visibility, the most famous name in the City?

At the time of Big Bang more than a decade ago, Cazenove deliberately went against the City herd, which was either merging like topsy in an ultimately fruitless attempt to mimic Wall Street's integrated investment banks, or selling up to Johnnie foreigner and retiring to the country with the labradors.

Instead, Cazenove opted to soldier on as before. Everyone said the partnership would inevitably wither and die, that there could be no place in the modern City for a firm of the old school like Cazenove, with its favour for a favour, socially networked style of operating.

An uncomfortable entanglement with the financial scandal of the decade, the Guinness

affair, only compounded that view. Cazenove suffered the humiliation of being struck off the Government's list of favoured advisers for privatisation. People started to read the last rights. But actually it hasn't worked out that way.

A brief nose round the firm's Tokenhouse Yard premises, just behind the Bank of England, reveals the old firm still in rude health. The fact that you never read about Cazenove anymore is pursued by the firm as deliberate policy. Not for Cazenove the loud swaggering of the modern investment bank. It is for the client to grab the limelight, should he want to do so, not the adviser or broker, is the general approach. It seems to work.

If the truth be known, most of the belated months of London's investment banking scene have long since given up on that traditional primary purpose of serving the interests of the client above all else. Their proprietary trading operations and wider global strategies make their own interests equally paramount. About the best the client can hope for is that his own interests will coincide with those of the investment bank. I exaggerate, perhaps, but only faintly.

Which may explain why at the last count Cazenove still had more corporate clients in the UK than any other securities house, including the giants of SBC Warburg, Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, Goldman Sachs, and Dresdner Kleinwort Benson. Even today, there's scarcely a major deal or takeover in the land where Cazenove is not present in some shape

or form. Right now it is involved in both substantial active takeover plays, GUS's bid for Argus, and Glaxo Wellcome's merger with SmithKline Beecham. Only you won't see its name on the press release.

Plainly, it must be doing something right. Part of that success is that clients still value the sort of self-effacing voice of independence that Cazenove stands for, perhaps even more so now than in the past. Furthermore, Cazenove's policy of distribution, its ability to find takers for equity offerings, remain supreme. This is particularly a self-fulfilling thing. Because of its power as a corporate broker, Cazenove has the choice of the new issues. As a fund manager, it always used to be said, you had to take your fair share of the dogs in order to receive the goodies.

There's less of that now. Rather the reverse. Cazenove famously resigned in protest as broker to the Telegraph a few years back after placing a large block of shares in the company. Shortly thereafter the newspaper cut its cover price and the shares plummeted. Cazenove was embarrassed enough to resign publicly and won plenty of plaudits in the City for doing so. The writ of the investor seems to run as supreme as that of the corporate client.

And that was about the last time we heard from Cazenove. Is it a good thing to be so low profile? Contrary to most popular thinking, the lesson seems to be that it certainly doesn't do any harm.

Indonesian plan to peg rupiah to the dollar 'premature'

Plans by Indonesia to establish a currency board and peg the rupiah to the dollar in an effort to bring stability to its troubled economy received a double blow yesterday after the International Fund and the US government said the move was premature.

Michel Camdessus, the IMF managing director, said it was too soon for Indonesia to adopt a currency board. He said that he was of "the strong view" that the time for a pegged currency in Indonesia had not yet come, because "a number of preconditions need to be satisfied". Mr Camdessus pointed to the need for adequate foreign exchange reserves and "more progress in the rehabilitation of the banking system".

Speaking at the Bretton Woods Committee's annual meeting, he said that without the necessary preconditions, there was a chance the currency board would fail, which would hurt the country's prospects for an economic recovery.

"The failure of a currency board would completely under-

mine credibility and policy-making and seriously damage the country's growth prospects," Mr Camdessus said.

Meanwhile, Lawrence Summers, the US Deputy Treasury Secretary, backed the IMF's stance on a proposed currency board, saying there was no "quick fix" to the country's economic problems.

Asked if Washington agreed with the IMF on the issue, Mr Summers told reporters, "I don't have anything to add. The United States is part of the (IMF) executive board."

The remarks come as Indonesia's President Suharto appeared to be pressing ahead with the controversial system as fresh rioting was reported in three Java towns over rising prices.

The argument sets the stage for a showdown with the IMF that economists warn could scuttle the country's \$40bn (£25bn) aid package.

Even before the tough talking, the rupiah had fallen as much as 24 per cent yesterday on concern the opposition to the peg would scuttle the plan. The

rupiah fell as low as 9,600 to the US dollar, traders said, from 7,300 yesterday. The fall dragged other south-east Asian currencies lower.

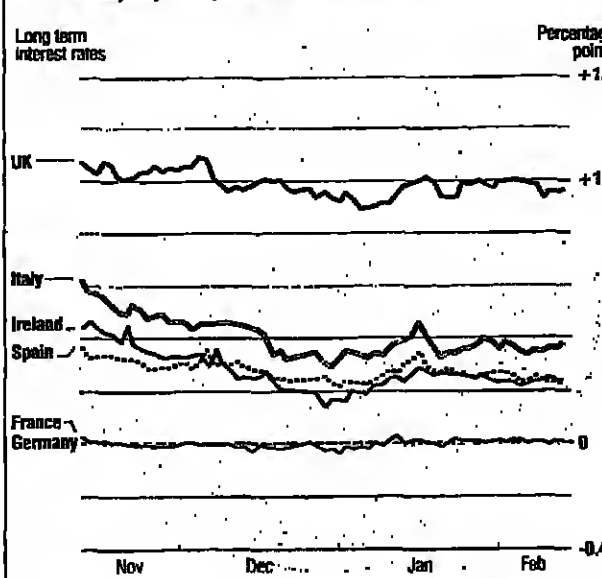
The President last month signed a new agreement with the IMF to push forward with sweeping economic reforms in return for a \$43bn bail-out package orchestrated by the fund. The currency rebounded after a key adviser on the currency plan said Suharto agreed to go ahead with the proposal in a meeting today. The rupiah traded recently at 8,200.

Separately, Indonesia's central bank governor called on developed countries to do more to help Indonesia, or take the risk of the country's problems spreading beyond Asia.

The call for help comes amid more reports of riots targeting Chinese shop owners as Indonesians scramble to find food and basic sanitary provisions. Indonesia is confronted with rampant inflation, surging unemployment and an economy that is expected to contract for the first time in almost 30 years.

Who will be in EMU? The financial markets' view

The closer other countries get to the dashed baseline (Germany) the more likely they are to join EMU.



TOWARDS EMU: If the line moves towards the German base line it means investors no longer require such a high premium for holding that country's bonds compared to German ones, because they are confident the currency won't devalue against the mark. In other words, they think that country will be locked into a single currency with Germany in 10 years' time.

AWAY FROM EMU: However, if they think the country won't be in EMU, that it will have higher inflation, and that there is a risk of a future devaluation against the mark, then they will demand an extra premium for holding that country's bonds, so the line will move away from the base.

When will EMU start? The City Analysts' View

The Independent asked analysts from: Nikko Europe, Paine Webber, ABN Amro, JP Morgan, Deutsche Morgan Grenfell, Salomon Brothers, Goldman Sachs, HSBC James Capel, UBS what probability they placed on EMU starting on time.

Probability EMU starts on time:	89%	(89% last week)
Probability EMU is delayed:	8%	(8% last week)
Probability EMU never happens:	3%	(3% last week)

Opposition fails to shake City's EMU prophecy

By Clifford German

The upsurge of popular opposition to European monetary union (EMU) in Germany this week, and the legal challenge being pressed in the constitutional court in Bonn have done nothing to shake the conviction in the City that EMU is past the point of no return. It will go ahead next January and almost certainly with Italy in the front rank as well.

The strength of the opposition was highlighted by a letter to the *Financial Times* from 155 German economists calling for EMU to be delayed "for a couple of years". Meanwhile, the constitutional court has agreed to indicate before the end of February whether it will hear the legal challenge to replacing the mark with the euro. Even if it accepts the responsibility, it is unlikely to give a ruling before the crucial reports from the European Monetary Institute on 25 March and the reports of the Bundesbank and other central banks which will follow. The reports of the Dutch central bank and the Bundesbank represent the last real possibility of delaying EMU, and Italy is the only candidate which central banks could recommend be excluded.

Barclaycard cuts interest rate on unpaid balances

Barclaycard, the UK's first credit card, yesterday launched a long-awaited counter-attack against cheaper rivals which have been steadily eroding its market share. Cardholders who spend £300 in a month will have the rate of interest charged on unpaid balances reduced from 1.65 per cent a month to 1.515 per cent in the following month, equivalent to cutting 2 per cent a year off the standard annual percentage rate of 22.9 per cent. If they spend £500 the interest goes down to 1.375 per cent the following month, a 4 per cent reduction in the APR. The controversial £10 a year annual fee will also be waived for all customers who spend £5,000 a year on their Barclaycards, or £3,000 a year on a Goldcard.

Arculus takes over at IPC

David Arculus, who announced his resignation from United News & Media on Thursday, yesterday confirmed that he is to take over as chairman of IPC, the magazine group which was bought out by its management last month. Mr Arculus, who was "delighted" to be taking on the part-time job, is expected to follow the rest of the management by taking a stake in IPC. Meanwhile, he is also believed to be preparing to take over as non-executive chairman of Severn Trent, the water company where he is already a non-executive director.

Finelist bids for IPG

Finelist, the acquisitive distribution group, yesterday announced a 150p a share cash offer for Independent Parts, valuing the automotive parts distributor at £38.4m. The offer is a 32 per cent premium to IPG's closing price on Christmas Eve, the last day before it revealed that it was in talks with a potential buyer. The offer has been accepted by major shareholders including Gartland Whalley & Barker, the AIM-listed corporate developer, and IPG's directors, giving Finelist acceptances representing 62.5 per cent of IPG's share capital.

Receivers in at On Demand

On Demand Information, the company that produces and publishes electronic directories and which asked for its trading in its shares to be suspended on 2 February, yesterday said it had called in the receivers. It said that, following consultation with the London Stock Exchange, it had been agreed that the company's suspension of listing should remain in force pending clarification of the company's financial position.

Grosvenor Inns reshuffle

Grosvenor Inns said yesterday it was on track to more than double the size of its Slug & Lettuce chain to 50 outlets by the new millennium. New sites include Canary Wharf in east London, Harrogate and York. The group is also renaming itself Slug & Lettuce after a wide-scale disposal programme which has seen it sell off most of its other assets. This programme led to a fall in pre-tax profits to £137,000 in the six months to 29 November against £1.1m a year ago. In a management reshuffle, Gary Pettit is stepping up to chief executive and Sheila McKenzie will take his place as managing director. Grosvenor has already identified another 70 new potential sites.

COMPANY RESULTS

	Turnover	Pre-tax	EPS	Dividend
Grosvenor Inns (p)	11.8m (11.82m)	0.137m (1.10m)	0.37p (5.89p)	3.00p (2.00p)
London Forthright (p)	2.27m (1.80m)	38.40m (37.50m)	29.50p (27.00p)	12.3 (11.2p)
Lloyds TSB (p)	-	3.18m (2.51m)	43.7p (22.1p)	-
Total Office Group (p)	55.25m (50.91m)	2.34m (2.22m)	8.1p (14.9p)	3.4p (4.1p)

(p) - Profit (t) - Income

Plessey sale adds £137m to GEC war chest

By Michael Harrison

GEC yesterday further strengthened its war chest by completing the disposal of its unwanted UK industrial businesses, with the sale of GEC Plessey Semiconductors to Mitec Corporation of Canada for £137m.

The deal lifts GEC's disposal proceeds to more than £300m and increased specula-

tion that it is preparing for a big acquisition, possibly of a US defence electronics business.

GEC is set to raise a further £11m from the flotation of a 26 per cent stake in the power engineering and transport joint venture GEC Alsthom this June. It already has £1.1bn of net cash even after paying out £300m earlier this year on a share buy-back.

GPS had sales of £215m and pre-tax profits of £7.2m in the year to 31 March 1997 and employs about 2,000 staff at factories in Swindon, Plymouth and London.

In total GEC has now disposed of businesses with combined sales of £1bn since Lord Simpson took over as managing director in September 1996. Analysts speculated that

GEC could be eyeing up a strike for Litton Industries of the US, which is valued at \$2.8bn, ITT Industries, which is worth \$3.8bn, or possibly even TRW which is valued at \$6.6bn. However, GEC is also considering buying out Siemens' 40 per cent stake in the joint telecommunications venture GPT. GEC's shares ended up 3p at 384p.

£2.5bn deal set to secure Airbus entry into Latin American market

By Michael Harrison

Airbus Industrie is poised to land a \$4bn (£2.5bn) order for 100 aircraft from a group of Latin American airlines, marking a further inroad by the European plane-maker into an area of the world traditionally dominated by its American rival Boeing.

The order is the single highest aircraft purchase placed in Latin America and the second largest order won by Airbus. The three airlines involved are the Chilean carrier LAN-Chile, and two airline holding companies, TACA of Central America and TAM of Brazil.

The orders are expected to be signed next month. A LAN-Chile spokeswoman confirmed yesterday that it had signed a let-

ter of intent with Airbus. The deal covers 100 single-aisle short-haul jets from the Airbus A320 family due for delivery from 2000 onwards. In addition the airlines are expected to take options on a further 100 aircraft.

Boeing dominates the South American aviation scene with a market share estimated at more than 80 per cent. So the Airbus order, thought to have been won with the promise of substantial discounts, will come as a blow to the Seattle-based group. Last year Airbus secured a \$5m order from USAirways for 124 aircraft and this month won a \$2.6bn order from Iberia of Spain, its biggest European deal.

Airbus won a record 460 firm orders worth \$29.6bn last year, breaking the previous all-time high of 421 firm sales in 1989.

BT under fire over unfair pricing of mobile phone service

By Chris Godsmark
Business Correspondent

British Telecom yesterday faced two adverse rulings from Don Cruickshank, the telecoms regulator, over unfair pricing of Cellnet mobile services and errors in price lists.

Last night Mr Cruickshank issued the first ever order against Cellnet, the UK's second largest mobile network, which is 60 per cent owned by BT. It followed complaints that Cellnet's wholesale tariffs offered to retailers gave bigger airtime service providers unfair discounts.

Though Cellnet approached Ofcom, the watchdog, with revised tariffs, Mr Cruickshank said the jury was still out on the packages and ordered the network to "bring discrimination to a halt."

In a separate ruling, BT's competitors were given the legal right to sue the company

yesterday by Ofcom, in a dispute over price lists. Mr Cruickshank yesterday issued a final order compelling BT to publish accurate and comprehensive lists of its retail and wholesale prices, after an investigation found "clear breaches" of BT's licence obligations.

next payment could equal that. All told they have raised around £1.8bn, having incurred costs of over £130m in the process, much of it in legal fees.

It's a busy time for insolvency practitioners, despite the buoyant economic conditions in the UK. Yesterday the courts appointed a third liquidator to Mr Morris's team, because he and Steve Akers are so busy on other cases.

The Deloitte partner Ralph Priest is the new man. One of his recent jobs was receiver to West Heath, the old school of Diana, Princess of Wales, on behalf of the Charity Committee. Mr Priest put the school on the market yesterday, in *Country Life* magazine.

Richard Branson's Virgin group is seeking an injunction to prevent an escort agency launched in London a year ago called "Virgin Escorts" from using the Virgin name. Virgin Escorts was registered as a company in High Holborn, London, in February 1997 by Robert Brown of Kingston Upon Thames, Sur-

rey, and Michael Brown of Inverness Terrace, London.

The writ lodged in the High Court last week says that "the Virgin name is one of the best known brand names in international business". Use of the Virgin name by the escort agency would "infringe the plaintiff's registered trademarks..." and the use of the sign would take unfair advantage of and would be detrimental to the distinctive character and repute of the plaintiff's Virgin mark.

The escort and dating agency was also guilty of "passing off" its services as those of Mr Branson's companies, the writ said. The plaintiffs said that, prior to the issue of the writ, the defendants refused to undertake not to continue using the name. The writ demands that the defendants stop using the Virgin name or anything like it, and claims damages of up to £10,000.

More Lloyd's names are preparing to follow the 66 who launched legal action last week against Norwich Union Life Insurance, over guarantees the company sold to names in the

1980s. The 66 who have served a writ on the Norwich, represented by solicitors Harknays, belong to a 200-strong action group, and more of the group are now expected to go to law. The case centres around guarantees, linked to life assurance policies, that Norwich provided to names for their use in the Lloyd's market, just as giant asbestos claims and "spiral re-insurance" were to push the market to the point of bankruptcy.

No figures are mentioned in the writ, but some sources speculate each name is seeking to escape debts on average of around £100,000. The names are claiming that since Norwich had two subsidiaries involved in the Lloyd's market, Norwich Winterthur Reinsurance and Stronghold Insurance, the respective heads of those businesses should have known about the likely problems in the Lloyd's market. The executives named in the writ are Michael Falcon, chairman of both NU Life and Norwich Winterthur, and Allen Bridgewater, chief executive of NU Life and also a director of the two Lloyd's businesses.

WHO'S SUING WHO

JOHN WILLCOCK



BCCI liquidators won the right yesterday to sue Ernst & Young for £1.1bn over the audit of the crashed bank just as Ernst & Young pulled out of merger talks with fellow accountancy giant KPMG, three Law Lords in the Court of Appeal unanimously overturned an order made in January 1997 which struck out claims brought by the liquidators of BCCI, Deloitte & Touche.

Mr Justice Laddie struck out the claims brought on behalf of BCCI (Overseas), a Cayman Islands registered subsidiary, against Ernst & Young, a firm which later became Ernst & Young. BCCI was closed by regulators in 1991 after massive long-term frauds were discovered, leaving the bank with debts of more than \$10 bn.

Chris Morris, lead liquidator, said yesterday: "We consider this judgment a very satisfactory result for the creditors of BCCI. We thought that the original Order was mistaken and we are pleased that the position taken by the liquidators has been vindicated."

Nick Land, senior partner at Ernst & Young, commented: "I am disappointed that the Court of Appeal have overturned Mr Justice Laddie's original ruling, but the Court have not found that a duty of care was owed by Ernst & Young to BCCI (Overseas) and I am confident that this claim will fail when the facts are fully examined at trial."

Mr Morris is also suing Price Waterhouse, the auditors to other parts of BCCI. The claims against the two accountancy firms amount to more than £1.8bn.

The liquidators are also suing the Bank of England in its role as co-regulator of BCCI. They lost the first round in court, but intend to pursue an appeal in May or June. Mr Morris's lead counsel for the case will be Lord Neill, a former master of All Souls College, Oxford, and chairman of the new committee on standards in public life.

Mr Morris is set to make a second payment to BCCI's thousands of creditors this June. The liquidators have already paid out over £1 billion to former customers, and the

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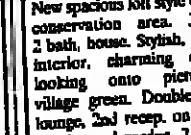
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Happiness is the 7.30 to town

What is it about the city?

As soon as people are in, they want to get out.

By Fiona Brandhorst

WHEN Alex White leaves his home near Peterborough for work every morning, a little plaque on the house opposite reminds him just how far he has to travel: London 87 miles.

We all know someone like Alex, indeed, we may even be like Alex, or one of the many disillusioned Londoners who packs his bags and heads for the towns and villages that make up commuter land in search of decent schools, less aggressive driving or perhaps just a better life.

Deciding to commute to his job in central London was the easy part for Geoff Hurrell. It was just a question of from where. With his wife, Julie, expecting their third child, they were rapidly outgrowing their modern south London town house and knew that it was time to make their longed-for break for the country.

Weekends were spent investigating the commuter trail from Essex through Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire and finally down to Kent. Tunbridge Wells was the end of their line. Geoff, an IT specialist, puts it down to a "gut feeling". They quickly realised they couldn't afford Tunbridge Wells itself so they took a look at surrounding villages.

They were dreaming of a period country cottage with oak beams and a roaring fire; they bought a four-bedroom, detached house circa 1970, but it is still "brilliant" in their eyes: "spacious rooms and large garden". The village had to be pretty, have a good school and "a couple of pubs, a post office and a Chinese". Pembury, now part of Tunbridge's sprawl, fitted the bill. "We haven't looked back," says Julie who, a year after their move, feels well settled in a community with a high percentage of ex-Londoners. Geoff now drives to the station in



The jewel in the commuters' crown: St Albans life, as experienced by John and Fiona Bennett, and daughter Rosalind

Photograph: Keith Dobney

an old banger "absorbed into the cost of the move" while Julie keeps the child-friendly estate car. "I'd take the bus to the station if it was more reliable," says Geoff, who aims for the 7.30am service to Charing Cross because it's always a new train "quiet and air conditioned" and he'll get a seat. His monthly season ticket costs around £230.

Geoff says he enjoys the 51-minute journey - he can read the paper, use his laptop or just "switch off". So does commuter chat become a hind when you're used to ignoring your neighbour at the bus stop in London? Geoff says it's all about body language. "You soon get the message if someone's feeling unsociable."

Having to drive home from the station in the evening means a couple of beers after work is a distance memory, but Geoff can live with that. On a good day he aims to be home around 7.30pm, just in time to catch Rebecca, five, and Alex, four, before they go to bed. But he misses one-year-old Emma who is so used to seeing him leave the house that until recently she thought he was called "bye, bye".

John Bennett's daughter, Rosalind, is only eight months old yet she can determine which train he'll catch to London every morning. If she sleeps in he can still make it to the office for 8.30am, John, a solicitor, lives with his wife, Fiona, in St

Albans - the jewel in the commuter's crown, where you can catch a Thameslink train, without checking the timetable, and around 25 minutes later find yourself pulling into London's Farringdon Station.

That and the good reputation of local schools have led to property prices rocketing in recent years. According to Frost's, a local estate agent, two/three bedroom "commuter cottages" in the conservation area of the town are priced between £110,000 and £179,950. And almost every person registering with the agency has a London address. John and Fiona left London three years ago, choosing St Albans because of family ties. "It's hardly the rural idyll," says John, "but

it has the feel of a big little town." They didn't want a drive to the station, so living in an out of town development was out of the question. John starts the day with a brisk 15-minute walk to the station. Generally, the Thameslink service is good, albeit crowded, but when it's bad, it's really bad and John is aware of the lack of an alternative route to work, something that living in London provided. His annual season ticket costs £2,236 and includes tube travel in central London. In spite of its cost he has no regrets. "The 20-minute journey is just long enough to read a few chapters or catch up on some sleep."

Carrie Elderfield is definitely on the out-

side looking in. "Mentally I'm not a commuter," she says. "I love observing but I haven't joined the club." The club, according to Carrie, being largely male middle Englanders. She said goodbye to Crouch End, in north London, almost four years ago and took the train west to the Chilterns where she feels at home with its "comforting landscapes". When she left Crouch End it was just beginning to become the "hub of the universe; a place that never slept - I hated all that".

Eighteen months after her move, Carrie married Roger, another ex-north Londoner and "hopeless townie". However, he's quickly become the star of the local pub quiz. Roger divides his time between commuting to the City by train or Europe by plane from Heathrow - only 40 minutes on the motorway. "That's an accidental bonus of living here," says Carrie.

But for some the daily commute finally takes its toll. Paul and Stella Bramwell moved to Lindfield (tile-hung houses, duck pond and historic parish church), near Haywards Heath, in Sussex, from London seven years ago. "Stella worked in Crawley and I could get the train straight into London," says Paul, who enjoyed the peace and quiet of the countryside at weekends. But after four years, Paul began to look at his fellow travellers and recognised a "lifer" feel about them. "I didn't want to qualify for the gold watch after 25 years of commuting," he says.

The three-hour round trip between Haywards Heath and London's Victoria made Paul, who works in advertising, question his priorities, especially when he and Stella had children. "I hardly saw Grace and Emily all week," says Paul. "It made us wonder why we'd had children in the first place."

When a job opportunity came up in Solihull in the Midlands last year, it was a chance to change their lifestyle once again. Now Paul, though still a commuter, has a 20-minute drive to work from their Bromsgrove home and he's usually home in time to see the children before bed. "Both moves have been good for us," adds Stella. "Lindfield was very relaxing. If it wasn't for the commuting, we'd probably still be there."

Sun, long days of golf, and incredibly cheap mortgages

IF YOU spent a glorious two weeks in sunny Spain, played endless rounds of golf in Portugal or sunk a few glasses of red wine in Italy while on holiday last year, you might well be thinking about buying a second home abroad now the weather is cold and grey.

But are you aware of the financial liabilities of doing so? Bills have to be paid, as do local taxes, income tax and - if you are on a development - community charges to cover the upkeep of communal swimming pools, gardens, etc.

Tony and Christine Collings bought a plot of land near Torrevieja on the Costa Blanca, Spain, last February for a three-bedroom chalet to be built. "I wasn't aware of how you bought a property in Spain," says Tony, "but Ultra Villas, which I bought the property through, explained exactly how it all works and they have been extremely helpful throughout. I also bought myself a book called *You and the Law*, which I read thoroughly so I understand how their system works."

Tony, who is casino manager for the Palm Beach Club in London, paid half in cash, half with a Spanish mortgage to put his mind at rest that everything was above board. Like our banks, Spanish banks check out the title of property and land before they lend.

It is quite easy to obtain an overseas mortgage in Spain. This is very cheap at the moment, 4.25 per cent for the first year, rising to 5.85 per cent after that.

It cost the Collings £90 to have the water meter installed and the same to connect the electricity. "I transfer money each month into a bank account there to cover the mortgage and anything else," says Tony. "The water bill is taken straight out of your account - if you do not have the funds, they cut you off. I also pay my Spanish solicitor an annual retainer of £90 and he deals with all bills or any help I might need."

In all, you pay around 11

per cent on top of the purchase price when you buy in Spain. This covers transfer tax, registration fee, solicitor's fee and notary's fee. The local tax on a £50,000 property is around £125 a year and a wealth tax, payable whether you make an income out of your property or not, is a little less.

In Greece, you will pay around 11 to 12 per cent purchase costs; in Portugal costs are a bit lower - around 8 to 9 per cent and in France, you are looking at around 11 per cent. "One thing you must be aware of when buying in France is their inheritance tax," says Trevor Bennett, of Bennett's solicitors, which deals with the purchase of properties in all those countries. "Before you buy the property, you must seek legal advice on this."

In Italy you also pay around 10 to 11 percent purchase costs. Rates are low - between £150 to £400 a year. A rubbish tax is also due which ranges between £50 and £200.

"Everything is perfectly straightforward, as long as you do not do it yourself," says Linda Travella, of Casa Travella, who sells property in northern Italy. "A new home might well have a mortgage on it, which although the notary or lawyer will pick up and have it cancelled, it is possible to be landed with mortgage payments you know nothing about if you try to buy on your own". A two-bedroom village property in Liguria costs around £36,000 and a large period apartment on Lake Como, from around £85,000.

Things are more straightforward and much cheaper, if you buy your retreat in Florida. Here charges will be not much more than 4 per cent, which includes title insurance. There is a 1 per cent annual property tax and community charges depend on the type of development.

The International Property Show is on today and tomorrow at The Cumberland Hotel, Marble Arch, London, W1, 10.30am - 5pm, admission free.

They can even charge rent on the cat

SEVENTEEN years of short holidays have prompted Dave Bell and Megan Jones to take drastic action. Giving up their jobs in caring professions - he's a mental health nurse, she's a drugs researcher - they are about to let their home and travel the world for six months with daughters Lily and Ruby.

"We've thought about it for years and now is the time before Ruby starts secondary school," says Dave. The family have been saving hard for the trip but for that "rainy day when we come back" they are renting out their four-bedroom, Brighton terrace property through agents Barnard Marcus. "We tried a couple until we found some who offered good service and the best deal. We're renting to single sharers and are surprised by how much we can charge."

Dave and Megan will receive £350 per week but must pay 16 per cent commission to their agents. Could they avoid this penalty by letting their property independently? "We'll be out of the country so we want the security of knowing someone will visit regularly. We paid £80 for an extremely thorough inventory clerk who made a note of any rips in the curtain linings." The clerk will take a final inventory in August before their return and deduct damage from the deposit.

The family's house was very much in demand. How did they choose their prospective tenants? "The agents checked references and financial status which helped. In the end we've



Nice big earners: The Bells expect to get £350 a week rent on their home in south London. Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid

gone for a group of trainee solicitors as they can't afford to put a foot wrong. I imagine it will be like *This Life* - there may be a few relationship problems but no wild parties," says Dave, a self-professed "trusting person", who is leaving most of their furniture but is locking away personal possessions in the loft on the agent's advice.

Dave has decorated and re-

moved all Spice Girls posters, but negotiations are ongoing over the fate of Billy the cat. A friend has agreed to cat-sit but the tenants want Billy to stay. "It seems a bit much paying for the pleasure of looking after our cat," says Dave.

There are other options for renting out your home, particularly if you prefer a longer-term arrangement. Many local

authorities and housing associations have private rental schemes which find landlords for people on their waiting lists.

Woking Borough Council introduced a scheme 18 months ago and is about to advertise for more properties. Its role is mainly introductory and tenants, often homeless families, pay rent directly to the landlord.

The council sets a bond of

£500 against which a landlord can claim for damage, although this is rare according to Jan Chapman, who runs the scheme. Who is the typical landlord? "They vary; from people who've inherited and don't know whether to sell, or they may have moved in with a new partner leaving their own home empty," says Jan. "Some have bought for investment."

Woking won't accept steep rents but it does agree an inventory, make follow up visits to check all is well and negotiate between landlord and tenant. It frequently finds replacements if tenants leave prematurely, as public housing is scarce and waiting lists are long.

Some authorities and associations extend the scheme by giving deposits to landlords and repairing the property if it gets damaged.

Steve Twyman owns a two-bedroom, Sixties-built terrace home on the Isle of Grain, which he bought in the mid-1980s. "I'd like to sell," says Steve, now living in Forest Hill, London, "but I'm in negative equity so I'm waiting for prices to rise."

He has a two-year lease with Swale, his local authority, which collects rent, does repairs and guarantees tenants for as long as he wants. Steve accepts he is not getting the maximum amount of rent for his house but prefers the security of a guaranteed income because of bad experiences with tenants. "Our agents were useless and didn't keep a good eye on the prop-

erty, leaving us with constant repairs. One guy moved out but had removed the fence and left an old MG in pieces in the garden. We eventually got it taken away but he came back for it and wasn't too happy."

Mortgage companies may be reluctant for you to rent out your property. Steve overcame this problem by talking to his lender, Barclays, which eventually agreed to a two-year period, the minimum lease that Swale would accept.

Jim Chadwick, marketing director for Barclays Mortgages, finds clients who are having difficulty selling often decide to let their properties. "We don't object as long as it's financially viable and on an assured shorthold tenancy so we can recover the property if things go wrong."

Barclays doesn't insist on mortgagees using agents or local authority schemes but recommends them for added security particularly if the home's are leaving the country.

Renting out your home can bring flexibility and finances to go with it. Tempted? As you read this Dave, Megan, Lily and Ruby are closing the door of their Brighton home, picking up their backpacks and heading for the warmer climes of the Caribbean.

National Housing Federation: 0171 278 6571; Woking Borough Council: 01483 755855; Swale Borough Council: 01795 424341; Barnard Marcus: 0171 924 2536

THREE TO VIEW/ FARMHOUSES



WORSTED FARM, a mile from East Grinstead in West Sussex, is a late 16th century Grade II listed timber framed farmhouse with a range of outbuildings and stables. The five-bedroom house stands in nine acres of land. Recently restored, it has a 17ft reception hall, study, large kitchen and cellar. There is a cow shed, several stable blocks, Sussex barn, Dutch barn and garaging. John D Wood (01342 326326) says the price is £585,000.



CHERRY GARDEN FARM in Rolvenden, five miles from Ten-Ten in Kent, is a Grade II listed Kentish farmhouse with exposed timber frame, leaded light windows and a peg-tiled roof. The 23ft sitting room has an inglenook fireplace and the large farmhouse kitchen has a walk-in pantry. Outside there are cottage gardens, former cattle byre, barn with a room above and a well. Agent Phillips & Stubbs is asking £215,000 (01797 253323).



RAM'S HILL FARM, six miles from Shaftesbury, in Dorset, a three-bedroom farmhouse being sold with an adjoining stone barn of farm buildings, has long views across the Dorset Downs. In need of improvement, with evidence of a big, old fireplace concealed in the sitting room. It is being sold with around 7.5 acres, but more is available. Agents Symonds & Sampson (01258 473766) says the price is £250,000.

Rosalind Russell

Their own little world

Penny Jackson on giving children space in the city

IN her perfect pink room, three-year-old Paige has no doubts about her favourite plaything. She gets up off her white sofa (washable) and opens the front of a town house with a flourish to reveal a fridge and cooker. Real ones that is. This Potemkin village is much more than a painted facade.

It is a child's world in a London house rather than just a child's room. The street scene which fronts the row of cupboards along one wall is as meticulous in its detail as every other item of framed and mounted memorabilia in the room.

Mary Hall, an interior designer and mother of Paige and Emily, seven, clearly does not belong to the hand-me-down school of decoration. "I wanted to create something special for the children that was nothing like the rest of the house," she says. "Everything is pink and white - the curtains, the picture frames, the kettle. When they come in here to play with their friends it is their own world. They have their drinks in the fridge and sink to do the washing up and they love it. They even love doing the washing up."

Parents in town seem prepared to spend more on their children's rooms than those in the country. There are no useful out-houses to colonise and urban space is at a premium, which is not helped by the fact that as more reception rooms are knocked through so there are fewer places to hide the clutter of toys and games.

If children are to be persuaded to play upstairs then it should be a pleasure rather than a penance, is Mary Hall's thinking. "I find I spend a lot more time up there with the girls than I might have done. It's an escape for me as well. You have to use your imagination, but be practical as well. The houses are made from panels of wood which can easily be removed from the cupboard doors. If you spend a fortune painting murals, it's awful when the children outgrow the pictures. But you can make these cupboards look different by changing the materials in the windows or the knobs or whatever."

The real test will come with the Halls' new loft-style home - just down the road from their present house - in the Piper

Building, the 1950s Fulham office block that is not naturally associated with family life or pink-and-white gingham. "At the moment I am thinking of designing something for the girls in the shape of a vast jigsaw," she adds.

Often the simplest solutions to creating play space go down the best. Simon Knox, an architect, was asked by one of his family how they could use a whole floor as a nursery, without the loss of one of the rooms. "We made a circular opening 6ft in diameter between the two rooms, which let the light through but kept the areas separate. It was painted brightly with one step and the children thought it was wonderful. They felt it was special and at the same time the adults could keep an eye on what was happening in the other half."

The next project for his own children is a garden den - something with a deck and sliding doors where they can sleep as well as play. Anna Markham, who inherited a rickety treehouse in her Sussex home, has seen it grow into a child's paradise of walkways and rope ladders. "They play pirates, have picnics, secret meetings, and have even slept there," she says.

"Most of the materials have been recycled so it has cost us virtually nothing. The trouble is that now the older children are planning how they can get a cable here for a television, which wasn't the point at all."

But for those who would prefer something less Heath Robinson, ready-made houses provide the answer. Not the plastic kind with the roofs that lift off, but something that looks more like the country cottage in a child's drawing and costs at least £16,000.

When Toni Friend first saw a Wendyhouse made by the Children's Cottage Company, it was instant love. "It was wooden and thatched. My husband thought I was mad, but I knew that the children would adore it. We have three sons and they spend an enormous amount of time in it which is perfect for me because I like the house spotless."

For those who have seen neglected playhouses decline into outdoor toy dumps, her decision has been vindicated. "It has carpet and specially made furniture and the boys

have planted bulbs in the window boxes. In the summer they have picnics there and in the winter they go out with flasks of hot chocolate. The beautiful thing is they can play imaginary games there with nothing to distract them."

Toni Friend even woke her children up one night in order to show the cottage to

a Greek couple passing through London. "You have to see it to appreciate it. And children will always look after something that is special."

So how much does all this effort appreciated by buyers. Unfortunately it can be all a terrible waste. Beany Pearce has just sold a house with a gorgeous children's

room, more usually seen in magazines than real homes. The buyer has no family and will be redecorating forthwith.

Children's Cottage Company: 0171 223 0876; Stonehall Design: 0171 621 9593; Mary Hall's house is for sale through Douglas & Gordon: 0171 731 4391.



Something in the city: Paige and Emily Hall in the environment created for them by their mother. Photograph: Nicola Kurtz



PENNY JACKSON

The big land buyers bottle out

THERE is a fair chance these days that the amateur developer can beat the big boys at their own game. The shortage of good houses, particularly in towns and villages, means that building plots are selling to frustrated private buyers.

Andrew Brown, of Clegg Kennedy Drew, says even though they know in their heart of hearts that they are paying top whack, for them it is worth it. On single plots they are beating the developer every time because they have no profit margins to worry about. It's the same with run-down properties.

The last three people in the current bidding for two Cotswold cottages are all individuals. "Of the 55 people we showed around, only 12 were developers," Andrew Brown says. "They looked at the lovely position of the cottages and knew they hadn't got a chance since anyone who wanted it as a home would pay over the odds."

The cottage industry feel to the rental market looks like changing. Savills has identified six corporate investors who want to invest £400m in buying property to let this year. That will account for about 9,000 properties across the country, not all of course coming on to the market for the first time, especially since the companies seem particularly keen to buy portfolios.

Savills regards its long-term interest in the rental market as a good omen for its future. At present the sector has a somewhat home-spin feel as about 56 per cent of landlords are private individuals. Apparently the companies are particularly keen on blocks in Manchester, Leeds and Bristol.

Space is vital at the moment. Berkeley Homes is building large leisure rooms with three of its houses in Hoxham, Sussex. They will either be put above the garage or as an annex to homes which are already in the region of 3,800 to 4,000 sq ft, which translates as at least five bedrooms, three bathrooms and three or four reception rooms. The extra room will be wired for office use or for children. Berkeley is even considering building basements into its homes on selected sites.

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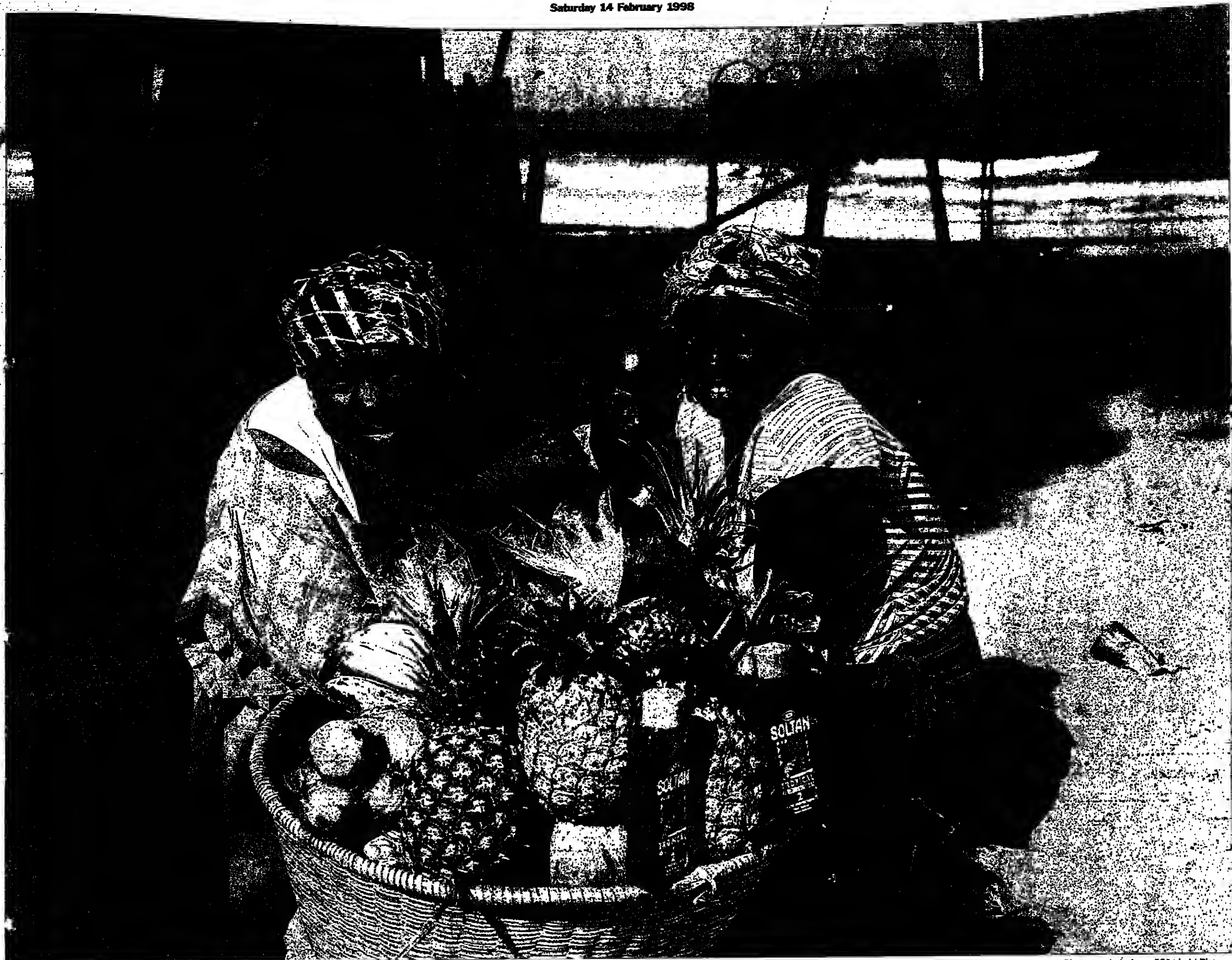


TIME OFF

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TRAVEL, LEISURE & SPORT

Saturday 14 February 1998



Bounty country: friendly faces help lighten your wallet in The Gambia

Photograph: Jedgam 98/World Pictures

Friends in need ...

"Hello my friends and welcome to The Gambia. What are your names? Can I walk with you?" We are strolling on an unpatrolled section of a wide sandy beach as the light fades into the sea, the grey-green Atlantic Ocean rolling in with a slow surge and then gently ebbing away.

I look at yet another new "friend". His name is Osman, the second most common name in the country after Lamin. His friends call him Donny (as in Osmond), and he wants to show us the crocodile pool and the national park, "where there are real lions, my friends", and the local school. Maybe even a trip to his compound in nearby Bakau. We have heard it all before.

Anyone thinking of going to The Gambia for a real African experience – not a mindless basking on the beach, although this of course is possible too – should be aware that there are many, many friends waiting to make your acquaintance from the moment your feet touch the soil. On the first night of our week-long stay we chose one "guide" (there are about 10-20 unofficially attached to each hotel) and paid him 25 dalasis (about £1.60) to show us around the local area.

We were staying at Cape Point in the Mariatou Beach Hotel, which was undergoing "renovation": it was a building-site. Sweetie took us away from this nightmare, showed us the best local bars and restaurants, and introduced us to his friends on the market (who marked our cards for later). He also took us to his compound in Bakau. This, I am afraid to say, made me feel as though I were in a film, mainly due to the contradictions of daily life. Higgledy-piggledy shacks and no electricity don't quite marry with the sound of Coolio's "Gangsters Paradise" blaring out of a transistor, and kids wearing Pepsi T-shirts dodging goats to play with a deflated football.

After our visit to Sweetie's modest shack he was our special friend, and we were his – for 50 dalasis a day, of course. We had a sim-

More coconut milk and crocodiles than discos and souvenirs, The Gambia gives you a warm welcome – even if you do have to pay for it, writes **Melanie Rickey**

ilar set-up with our cab driver, Seiko, who would wait for hours outside a club or restaurant while we enjoyed ourselves. In all, our "wages" bill for the week came in at a reasonable £40 and our liberal European consciences were assuaged by providing some small-scale employment.

The Gambia has 25 miles of sandy shoreline south of its capital, Banjul, and is only 300 miles deep. On the map it looks like a crooked finger poked into the side of West Africa, with Senegal surrounding it on three sides. It is named after its river, and was colonised by the British in 1783, who used the waterways primarily to transport slaves. For such a turbulent part of the world, it has an unremarkable recent history, notable only for the coup, and then counter-coup (both bloodless), in 1994, which left a 28-year-old man in charge of the country. Whitehall reacted by issuing travel advice warning against visiting The Gambia, the big tour operators evacuated clients, and the tourist industry declined sharply.

Today the country is still in recovery and as a result is presented to potential holiday-makers as a cheap package destination, with the em-

phasis on "cheap" rather than "affordable". Yet there are no lager louts, no discos pumping out the Spice Girls, and not a high-rise hotel in sight. Beach hawkers sell freshly picked bananas and coconuts – not ice-creams or tourist trophies. The bevy of bottle blondes who applied lipstick on the beach, however, seemed lost without those familiar sights and would have been better off in Lanzarote. Therein lies the country's main problem: the need to attract the "right" kind of tourist.

The climate is perfect for a winter getaway: it is dry and hot from December to March. Indeed, the sensation of arriving to a blast of 36-degree heat only six hours, and no time difference, away from Britain is second to none for decadence value, and the weather doesn't falter. The only drawback is the Saharan wind which blows sand into the atmosphere, creating a haze that can sometimes last all day. But it does take the temperature down a notch or two.

Enjoying The Gambia is easy once you get the hang of it. Gambian time is not like English time. Ask for a drink – the local beer, Joyful Jubrew – and it will arrive when the

barman is ready. Head to Banjul, where for a few pence the local ferry dawdles across the mouth of the river Gambia to the town of Barra, loaded with cows, chickens and brightly dressed traders, and you find there is no timetable. "When will the ferry arrive?" We asked an official after a 90-minute wait. "Ob, any time, any time," came the reply.

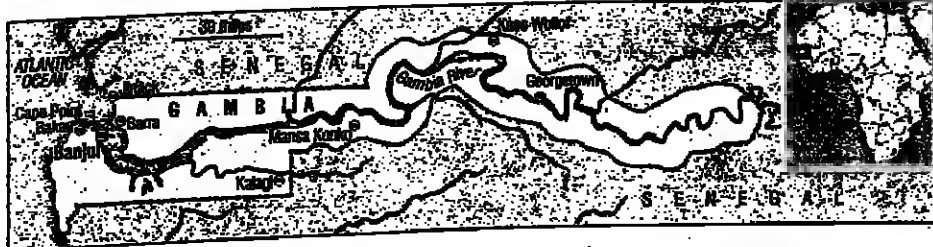
While in The Gambia, there is only so much to do, see and discover. Every visitor goes to the local school, the nature reserve, and the crocodile pool to see "Charlie", one-time star of *'Wish You Were Here'*. There are only a few good restaurants and a handful of jolly local bars fringing the main tourist strip. You do not have to venture far inland to find landscape typical of the whole country: languid lowlands, laced with labyrinthine sandy paths and speckled with friendly, scruffy settlements.

Our happiest moment was the discovery of a day out to Paradise Island, or Jinack, which is half in Senegal, half in The Gambia. It began as a day-trip and turned into an overnight stay at Madyama Lodge, a compound of 10 luxury mud-huts, with a central area for eating and drinking. Though the term "luxury mud-hut" may sound like an oxymoron, it wasn't.

The beach was completely deserted but for a few early-morning fishermen and the odd cow, and there was affordable food and drink and personal hospitality from our hosts. This experience, more than any other, may lure me back to The Gambia.

Getting there: Melanie Rickey paid £469 for an eight-day holiday from Airtours (01706 232323), including flights from Gatwick and B&B hotel accommodation. Other operators include First Choice (0161-745 7000) and The Gambia Experience (01703 730888).

Further information: The Gambia Tourist Office, 57 Kensington Court, London W8 5DG (0171-376 0093).



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The geography of lurve

Passion and travel are permanently entwined. To celebrate the first Valentine's Day to fall on a Saturday for 10 years, the travel section is offering prizes you'll love in our first 'smooch your way around the world' quiz

There are 11 steps to heaven. First, answer these 10 questions as best you can; in the affectionate nature of *The Independent*, we value heroic endeavour rather more than total accuracy, it makes us laugh, and we'll forgive the odd mistake. Next, complete the tie-break on the ideal venue for smooching, and you'll be on the run-way for a free flight for two on the ultimate romantic airline, Love Air.

This carrier for canoodlers has an international network that stretches all the way from Biggin Hill in Kent to Le Touquet on the north coast of France. Normally, the lowest fare on this run is an instant-purchase £99 return, but Love Air (01279 681435) is offering a loving couple a free day-trip.

The 10 runners-up won't have to seek solace in each other's arms - Cadogan Books is offering its perfectly matched couple of love guides, *Have Bride, Will Travel* and *Perfect Honeymoons and Original Weddings*, which normally retail at £8.99 each.

Send your entry to The Geography of Love, Travel, *The Independent*, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, to arrive by 29 February (OK, we know there isn't one this year, but it sounded more romantic than 1 March).

Entries from same-sex or mixed-sex couples are equally welcome. This competition is not open to employees of Newspaper Publishing plc, their families and present or former partners. The Travel Editor's decision is possibly overly sentimental, but definitely final.

1. Success, Paradise, Friendship and Ogle are all real place names. In which South American country would a guy find them?

- (a) Guyana
(b) Paraguay
(c) Uruguay

2. IAN, SUE and IAN are in one country, while

BOB, SID and LIZ are elsewhere. What would be the best means of transport for them to get together - and why?

3. Where is the best place to find a MAN?

4. Hope, Derbyshire; Desire, Louisiana; Happy, Texas. Which was the stamping-ground of Tennessee Williams?

5. ... and which of Alfred, Lord Byron?

6. In which US location would Gary Puckett be most likely to find true love with a young girl?

- (a) Union City, Tennessee
(b) Union Grove, Illinois
(c) Union Gap, Washington

7. ... and where would Blondie be blonde?

8. Which is the closest airport to Kissimmee?

- (a) Love Field, Texas
(b) Orlando International, Florida
(c) French Lick, Kentucky

9. Wedding is in Germany and Blessing is in Texas. So where is Font?

10. River deep, mountain high: one of these geographical features is a mountain, while the other two are rivers. As the climax of this competition, name the hill:

- (a) You, China
(b) Pasion, Guatemala
(c) Yes, England

Tie-break: complete the following in 12 words or thereabouts: "The place I would most like to be kissed is ..."

In order to avoid the risk of a Clintonesque kerfuffle, any tie-break suggestions that mention one or more body parts will be immediately disqualified.



DAVID ASHWIN

Lovebirds and the raging torrent of emotion

There are waterfalls and then there are the Niagara Falls, the widest falls on earth. Arguably the most romantic, too, for Niagara calls itself the world's honeymoon capital. Of its 12 million annual visitors, 500,000 are newlyweds.

Lovebirds flock to Ontario's Niagara rather than its sister town in New York State. Though Horseshoe Falls and the American Falls thunder across the international border, Uncle Sam only gets the dregs of this particular tourist barrel. The awesome views are on Canada's side. And the crowds view from every vantage point - from boats, aero cars, towers and scenic tunnels. Tightwad's gather at Table Rock, a free lookout spot where even cynical divorcees get dewy-eyed. Horseshoe Falls has a splashdown rate of 1 million bathtrubs per second and its spray clouds simply devastate a girl's mascara.

It was at Table Rock that the cascades had

Steenie Harvey visits Niagara Falls, the honeymoon capital of the world

to share star billing with Marilyn Monroe in the 1952 movie, *Niagara*. The film was touted as "a raging torrent of emotion that even nature can't control", yet the critics were more smitten by Monroe's wiggly walk.

Niagara's ideas of seduction range from rainbows in the mist to legends of Indian maidens sacrificed to the insatiable god of the Falls. Not that everyone succumbs to the magic. Oscar Wilde sneered that for newlyweds, "Niagara must be the second highest disappointment of American married life".

Ah, but now wedded bliss is enhanced by heart-shaped love tubs and king-sized waterbeds. Resort motels are packed even

when it is -25°C and an ice bridge spans the Niagara river. Valentine's Day is the steamiest time of all.

Things were somewhat different in 1795. Then government officials declined to lay a trail to the Falls, as "nobody wanted to see them but small boys".

The early railroads proved them wrong, of course, and sooo countless North American brides were demanding Niagara honeymoons. With the bridal trains came a hairy army of adventurers. Charles Blondin tightrope-danced across Niagara's gorge in 1859, pausing midway to drain a bottle of wine. He performed the feat many times - blindfolded, on stilts and pushing a wheelbarrow. Schoolteacher Anna Edson Taylor survived a trip over Horseshoe Falls in a barrel in 1901, but other locations weren't always as fortunate. Niagara can indeed be an all-too-fatal attraction.

Such stunts are now illegal, so daredevils must make do with Clifton Hill, Niagara's "street of fun", where every night is Weird Night. Gruesome twosomes put their throbbing loins on bold and instead trapse doggedly between Dracula's Castle, Movieland's Waxworks and Ripley's Believe It Or Not museum, whose oddities include an effigy of a Chinaman apparently born with four eyeballs.

Some go on to snicker at monstrous cucumbers in the Guinness Records Museum; others thrill to Jeffrey Dahmer, who flaunts his waxen charms in the Criminals' Hall of Fame. Then there's the JFK Assassination Exhibit, the Elvis memorabilia, Niagara Falls Museum's two-headed calf, the replica Crown Jewels...

But lovers should beware. On this street of unnatural wonders, it's not only a passion for Niagara that may well begin to wilt.

GREEN CHANNEL

How do you see the wildlife of the world without travelling? The Lovers' Trail at the Natural History Museum may be the answer. This is not an opportunity for lovey-dovey couples to smooch behind the stuffed animal cases (although presumably they can); it is in fact an activity trail for children to find out more about "the birds and the bees" from around the world, literally.

With a choice of 68 million plants, animals, fossils, rocks and minerals, the Natural History Museum can be a daunting place. But the Lovers' Trail demystifies everything, with a simple, fact-finding tour around the Life galleries. The trail takes you through the logically named Birds' Gallery, Creepy Crawlies' Gallery and Mammals' Gallery, and highlights some of the tactics different species use in courtship.

Pick up the receiver next to one of the insect boxes, and you can hear the chirps of South African crickets and cicadas from Southern France, and the hissing of a Dutch cockroach. "Try to imitate the sound of each insect," your Lovers' Trail guide says. And then it asks you to look around you. "Have you attracted a mate while making these sounds?" it asks. If you have, no doubt you should call security.

Spiders are not famous for their "ooh, ahhh" factor, being neither cuddly nor beautiful, but it turns out that the male hunting spider, found all over the world, is an old romantic: he has brought the female a present - some sort of food (an insect). The fact that he does this as a ploy to distract her from his real intention - sex - and that he sometimes cheats and gives her a duff present (a dried-out skeleton), makes one wonder about the similarities between human courtship patterns and spiders'.

Suddenly that cheap box of chocolates takes on a much more obvious meaning. Watch and learn, kids.

Sue Wheat

The Natural History Museum (0171-938 9123) is at South Kensington, London SW7. It opens at 10am on Mondays to Saturdays, and from 11am on Sundays, and closes at 5.50pm daily. Admission is £6 for adults, £3 for children and £16 for a family ticket (two adults and up to four children). Admission is free after 4.30pm on weekdays and 5pm at weekends.

RED CHANNEL

Advice from The Gambia Experience (01703 730888) on how to avoid bustling.

Do not be over-generous when tipping or paying for small errands or favours; this will give out the wrong signals.

Be wary of well-worn "sob" stories, eg "No milk for the twins"; "I live in Brikama [or Lamin], just around the corner". The list goes on and on.

If you are walking along the beach when approached, it helps if you walk into the sea. Gambians are keen footballers and are invariably reluctant to get their trainers wet.

LOW RAILROAD

Going underground on London's Tube network is rendered much easier by the use of escalators; but so sceptical were the capital's travellers when moving staircases were first introduced that Loodoo Transport was obliged to employ a one-legged man, "Bumper" Harris, to ride up and down all day, to convince the public of the devices' safety.

On 18 March, at the London Transport Museum (0171-379 6344), Mark Dennison, the curator, will be discussing innovation in a talk entitled "It'll never work" (which, in the case of the ill-fated spiral escalator, seems appropriate). He will also reveal how fish were, for a time, transported on the Circle Line - though escalators were never used as impromptu salmon leaps. The event begins at 6.30pm, and tickets cost £6 (£4 conc).

HIGH RAILROAD

On 25 July this year, a small group will set off from London bound for the Indian city of Madras by train - the difficult way. An "exploratory grand tour" is being arranged by Hinterland Travel (01883 743584). Geoff Hann, who is planning the jaunt, says it will involve crossing the Caspian Sea by ferry, and also takes in Moscow, Tehran, Lahore and the Khyber Pass. Travel will be mainly in second and third class, and the expected one-way fare for the 60-day trip is £1,100, plus the cost of board and lodging.

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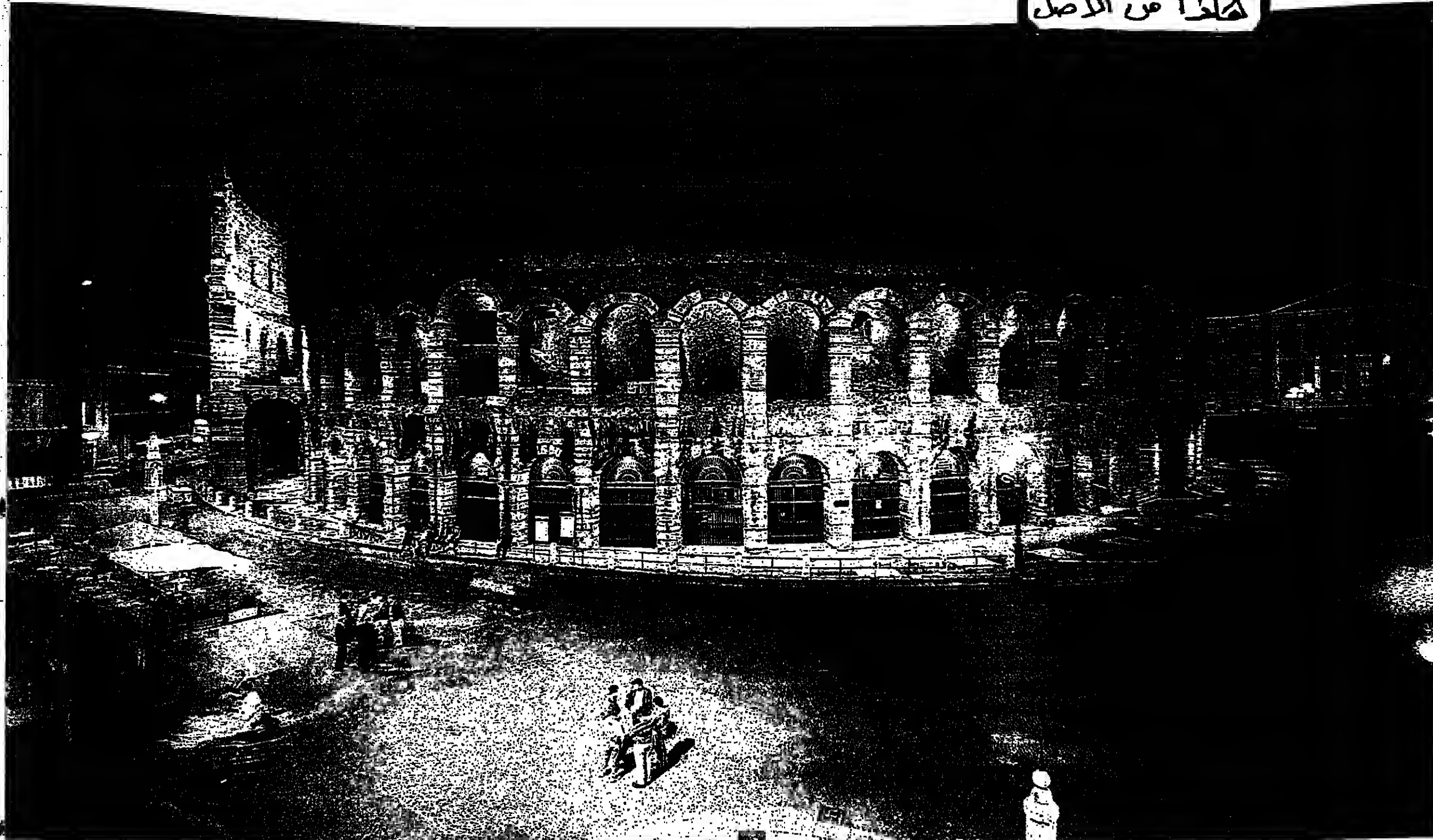
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You need a break, and a shortcut to the soul of a city. This week, **Andy Bull** lives like a gentleman in Verona.

Why go now?

Verona – historic, sophisticated and manageably compact – is worth going to simply for the atmosphere of the place itself. And, if you are not coming for the celebrated opera season between June and September, it is perhaps as well to visit in February, when the city is cool and far less crowded with the sort of visitors who hunt in packs, following the scent of an umbrella raised aloft by a harassed tour guide.

Beam down

British Airways (0345 222111) has a monopoly of scheduled flights from the UK to Verona. The lowest fare is a World Offer of £164.10 – if you book by next Wednesday.

Get your bearings

The city, surrounded by cypress-covered hills, and with the river Adige curling through its ancient centre, glows gently with the red, ochre and pink of its distinctive marble. Verona is still largely enclosed by its 16th-century fortifications, and wears its past – Roman ruins, tall, slim towers that speak of the Venetian empire, and bulbous Baroque churches – with easy pride.

The tourist office is at 38 Piazza Erbe; its telephone number, like many in the city, has just changed; dial 00 39 45 806 8680.

Watch out for...

Vespa riders. The town centre is largely pedestrianised, something that has not been fully explained to these motorised masters of style who claim the narrow streets squeezed between the towering buildings as their own.

Check in

Cheap and cheerful: Villa Francescatti Youth Hotel (00 39 45 590 360) at Salita Fontana del Ferro 15; dormitory and family-room accommodation only, but the price is just £7 per person per night, including breakfast.

Moderate and merry: Antica Porta Leone (00 39 45 595 499) at Corticella Leoni 3. Doubles from £40, including breakfast.

Ritz and romantic: Due Torri Hotel Baglioni (00 39 45 595 044) at Piazza Sant'Anastasia 4. Doubles from £100.

Take a hike

Verona is best explored on foot. The most central starting-point for a tour of the city is Piazza Bra, which flanks the southern sweep of the oval Roman arena. There is parking close by at Cittadella, where you can pick up a useful free map, courtesy of McDonald's.

From here the arena really is impressive. It measures 150m by 130m, seats 25,000 and has perfect acoustics. And, despite clearly having been knocked about a bit, it still rises to 30m, dwarfing everything around it. During the opera season you can enter only in the mornings, but all day the rest of the year.

From the arena take the Via Mazzini to the heart of the old city. Here, two wonderful squares – the Piazza dei Signori and the Piazza delle Erbe, form the centrepiece.

The former is soberly elegant, flanked by the 12th-century town hall and the 13th-century Governors' Palace, and with a statue of Dante in the centre. The latter, crammed with the flower, fruit and vegetable stalls of the market, is full of noise and colour. As it should be: this was once the Roman forum, where chariot races were held.

Up five steps and under an arch from Piazza dei Signori, you reach Piazza Mazzanti. It is surrounded with houses from which balconies thrust, making it feel like another open-air theatre, except that the focus of attention is not a stage but an ornate, pink marble well. Let's hear it for the bucket. And the bucket-hauler.

Lunch on the run

Via Mazzini has many inexpensive but perfectly good places to eat, including La Bottega, Del Vino and Le Tre Corone.

Cultural afternoon

Though the Arena and the churches are the real treasures of Verona, you should come to terms with the dynasty that made the city. North of the Piazza Mazzanti you come to the tombs of the Scaligeri, Princes of the Scala, who lorded it here from 1260 to 1387, before the Venetians took over, and left a considerable mark on the city.

To reach their castle, which guards the bridge they built over the Adige, walk to the northern end of the Piazza delle Erbe and turn left into the Corso Porta Borsari. This leads into the Corso Cavour; the castle, with its distinctive swallow-tail battlements, is a few hundred metres ahead on your right. It contains the city's museum of art, with frescoes from the 12th to the 16th centuries, and works by the Veronese and Venetian schools. It is open daily except Monday, 9am to 7pm, admission £4.

Window shopping

Walk along Via Mazzini and look longingly at Duca d'Aosta and Emporio Armani.

An aperitif

Piazza Bra has gardens shaded by mighty cedars and a swath of the most fashionable – and expensive – café terraces in town. If you prefer coffee and cakes to Campari, try Al Teatro Filarmonico, off Porta Nuova, at about £3 a head.

Demure dinner

At I Dodici Apostoli (the 12 apostles) at Corticella San Marco 3, you get Renaissance frescoes on the walls and Renaissance dishes on the table – including horsemeat stew. Cost, around £20 a head.

Sunday morning: go to church

You now need a voucher (6,000 lire, £2.50) to visit Verona's churches. Buy it at the first one you visit; it entitles you to see four more as well. Best of the churches: San Zeno, with its altarpiece by Mantegna, the Duomo, and Sant'Anastasia with wonderful frescoes.

Fine romance: Verona wears its past with pride – the Roman arena, top, and the church of San Zeno, above, being among its most rewarding sights.

Photographs: Attitude/Bruce Coleman

Bracing brunch

Brek, in Piazza Bra, offers mountains of self-service food and wine for £5.

A walk in the park

Verona turns its back on the Adige, but a walk across the Ponte Nuova to the left bank ushers you to one of Europe's most moonlight city gardens. Behind the Palazzo Giusti a haze of greco struggles to retain

its formality as it battles up the hillside terraces, rewarding those who persevere this far with the finest view of Verona.

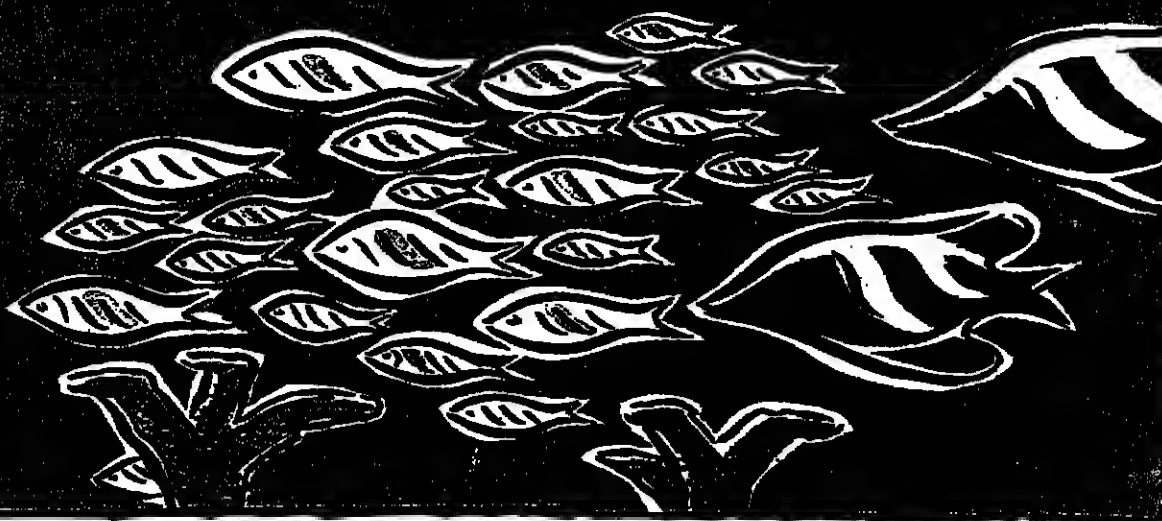
The romantic icing on the cake

Leading off Piazza delle Erbe is Via Capello. At No 23 is Casa di Giulietta, the 13th-century palace of the Capuleti, with Juliet's balcony looking like a tough climb in tights. The house is open to the public daily, except

Monday, from 9am to 7pm, admission £3.

If the story of the star-crossed lovers – whose families were divided because Romeo's supported the Pope while Juliet's rooted for Emperor Frederick I – grips you sufficiently, you may like to take a one-mile detour to Juliet's tomb, which is in the Capuchin Cloisters – off the Via del Pontiere to the south of the arena and close to the Adige river.

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True stories from the naked city

Sheffield's new airport opens to commercial flights on Monday, placing the city of the Full Monty on the international tourism arena. A fully clothed Bob Carter offers a guide

The sky's the colour of sheet steel, the drizzle is slanting down, and the canal-side mud seeps into my shoes. I'm in the east side of Sheffield, a city where the buzz-words are regeneration and service industry. This is a conurbation where the remains of heavy industry rub shoulders with mail-order firms and telebanking organisations. No place for a tourist, surely, yet Sheffield's best ambassador of late has been a low-budget film set in the city's grimmer quarters, about the desperate lengths men on the dole will go to in order to generate some income.

There are plenty of places that proclaim themselves in film: the Rockefeller Building in New York has been in as many films as Michael Caine. We've seen Hollywood Boulevard, the canals of Venice and even the former warehouses of London Docklands enough times; now it's Sheffield's turn.

I call Sheffield's tourist information office to see if they have anything to offer. "We haven't, but there are people looking into it," says Jane, who gives me the number of Destination Sheffield, a non-profit, grant-aided company set up by stakeholders in the city including the universities and various commerce and tourism interests.

"We've had a couple of enquiries about *Full Monty* tours but as far as I am aware there are no official ones," they say. Strange. Yorkshire people have long known that where there's film, there's brass. Farther north you no longer move between town and district; you take your tour through Herriot Country, stop and admire Brontë Country and take a trip to the Sixties in *Heartbeat* Country. So what about Montyland?

Which is how I end up by the canal. The Sheffield and Tinsley Canal reaches the very centre of the city, an area that used to be pretty much derelict and was called, not unreasonably, the Canal Basin. It's now Victoria Quays, where the city's oldest surviving factory has become a "pleasant pub for nice people", or some such slogan. So far as business is concerned, it stands alone on the waterfront beside yet-to-be-let railway arch shop units. It's all restored and shines too brightly, with its newly scrubbed stone and painted mowings. I even suspect the kingfisher is in on the plot.

Five minutes along the towpath, and it's all changed, a bewildering mixture of new industrial buildings and old industrial ruins, quite atmospheric and just the place to open a film. Which is what they did, with Robert Carlyle balanced atop a sunken car.

The canal is also where you may one day find them cashing in on *The Full Monty*. Boat folk are canny. Paul Grange is a partner in Aitken Grange Cruising Company: "We don't run a *Full Monty* trip; we have thought about it, and we may sell the trip in Sheffield as being based in the land of Monty, but not for this year."

They do offer trips and short breaks on their boat, *The Tiny Purple*. From March to October it's a small floating hotel, cruising out of Sheffield on two- to four-day breaks, and from October to mid-January as a floating, one-table restaurant offering a two-and-a-half-hour trip with a three-course meal from £15 a head.

"The film I think was excellent," says Paul. "It captured the essence of Sheffield in its way. Especially the canal scene where the guy walks past with the dog. That was totally coincidental. You could not get anything more natural than that."

Natural maybe, but for a tourist on *The Full Monty* trail, a man and a dog would not be enough. Where were the strippers to be found? "Male strippers?" asks Paul. "I don't know." His voice brightens: "I do know where there are a lot of female strippers - some of the local pubs." So I try one, just around the corner from Sheffield United's Bramall Lane ground.

Here, Jean, in exchange for a vodka and Coke, proffers the information that South Yorkshire really does have male and female strippers, in a pub in Barnsley, and it costs only £1 to get in. Joanne (half of Jager) thinks male stripping is, frankly, a bit passé. Fabian was doing it in a Sheffield nightclub, and going all the way, long before the film came out. Obviously I've chosen the wrong pub.

Time, then, to return to the real locations: let's try the exteriors first, where the characters exercised. Taking my trusty A to Z I set off for Parkwood Springs. No luck; no middle-aged men in ill-fitting tracksuits here; but on this damp winter Saturday it was crowded with people - skiing. Just out of sight of filmgoers throughout those sequences is Europe's biggest artificial ski resort, and a climb or a ski-lift to the top rewards you with the best view over the city.

But no sign of *The Full Monty* here. Nor at the old Langsett School, which doubled as a school from the outside and job club inside. Part of it is now the Sheffield Boxing Centre, from which a group of young men with short haircuts and long arms emerged. I wasn't going to ask them where I could look at naked men.

A short drive to the aptly-named Grimesthorpe area (yet to fall victim to the passion for renaming that has overtaken this city), and you can find, on Idsworth Road, the exterior of the "club" in which the troupe performed. Now those inverted commas denote that it is not a club at all; a former cinema, casino and bingo hall is now The Inter Home Furniture Warehouse.

It's run by the Masoud family, and Rasah took me round. Fascinating as beds, sofas and even their own little furniture factory are, they are not *The Full Monty*.

By now it is getting dark, and still no Monty. But I have one big chance: Shiregreen Working Men's Club. Inside the club, on a weekday at 10am, an audience of women club members saw from the front what cinema-goers only saw from the rear: the final, all-out strip.

Secretary Terry Green takes me round: to the bottle store which became a dressing-room, white paint covered with film-makers' grime for more northern realism; to the toilets, essential of course to any modern British film; and then to the committee room - not in the film - for a chat.

To the people of that area, he says, the desperate measures of the unemployed were a reality. It seems a million miles from the go-ahead optimism presented a couple of miles away by Sheffield's marketing arm. The divide, he concludes, is getting wider. Downstairs an insistent bass sound heralds the arrival on stage of that night's turn. At last, I think, a chance to see the real *Full Monty*. But it's just a duo with a keyboard, pretty good in their way, but not the Monty experience I am seeking. And they've even covered up the gold curtains the film crew left behind.

I get a bus back into town, and suddenly I am safely back in Sheffield, tourist town, with the restored Lyceum Theatre shining in the floodlights, the Crucible Theatre next door, and the wonderful Ruskin Gallery. I walk past the inspiring Victorian town hall (soon to be incorporated in a new development with an offshoot of the Victoria & Albert Museum) past the imposing city hall and into what is now known as the Devonshire Quarter, where Saturday night is in full swing, shirt-sleeved queues spilling out of bars, cafés and clubs. I fall into the one without a queue and order a beer, as a jazz trio ploughs through *Summertime*, taking 24-bar solos each. And so my search for *The Full Monty* ends.

As a footnote, for those who really want to discover Sheffield's industrial heritage, a visit to Kelham Island Industrial Museum would save a lot of shoe leather; it shows the huge industrial achievements of big men with larger-than-life dreams and even bigger machinery. And it doesn't skip the cost to the workers, either.

Sheffield Tourist Information Service (0114-273 4672); Aitken Grange Cruising Company (0114-243 0964 or 0802 471100); Kelham Island Museum, Alma Street, (0114-272 2106); Sheffield Ski Village, Vale Road, Parkwood Springs (0114-276 9459); Inter Home Warehouse, Idsworth Road (0114-244 4440); Shiregreen WMC, Shiregreen Lane (admission to members and CIU affiliate members only, 0114-249 2214).



Raw power: 'The Full Monty' has put the Steel City on centre stage

Photograph: Peter Byrne/Guzelian

FROM AMS TO SZD: THE CITY OF STEEL GETS AIRBORNE

You can fly to Sheffield City Airport from anywhere you want, so long as it's Amsterdam. KLM uk (0990 074074) is starting with three daily services during the week, with one on Saturday and two on Sunday. The main target is likely to be business travellers; you can't help wondering about their reaction to the sight of Doncaster and Rotherham as they make their final descent to the city of steel.

It would not take a cynic to say that the last thing Sheffield needs is an airport, what with Leeds/Bradford one way, and East Midlands the other along the M1. This, though, makes the site ideal, at least to Jon Horne, the airport's managing director: four miles from the centre of Sheffield, five minutes from the M1, and a 45-minute drive for four million people - if they don't all try to do it at the same time.

He's come up from London City Airport to run this place, unlikely described as a tin hut on a slag heap, more kindly thought of as a small to medium terminal on a reclaimed area of open-cast mining. Sheffield, Horne says, with campaigning zeal, is the fourth largest city in England, and until now, the biggest city in Europe without its own airport. Now "SZD", as it will appear on tickets, takes its place in

the OAG Pocket Flight Guide, its single service squeezed between Sharurah (Saudi Arabia) and Sheikh (Ethiopia).

The vision includes an adjacent business park, but at present the nearest building is large and dirty, with lots of pipes and a smoky chimney. An interesting welcome for the first airborne overseas visitors.

Bob Carter

Gallery of sounds

David Wilson previews the National Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield, a Lottery-funded project devoted to 'the most popular art form in the world'.

Hip-hop, trip-hop, ambient, house, garage, big beat, breakbeat, rap: pop, it seems, is constantly expanding. So the plan to establish the world's first centre for popular music, in Sheffield, may seem ambitious. Three years ago, while the centre's future was still uncertain, the Arts Council finally recognised pop as an art form. This allowed the organisers to apply for and win an £11m Lottery grant.

"We were ecstatic," says Tim Strickland, creative director. "And relieved, for an hour, then it finally sank in - the thought of the enormous amount of work ahead."

Regardless, the National Centre for Popular Music is well on its way and should open this year. Sheffield is a fitting location because it has an impressive music heritage (Human League, Baby Bird, Pulp), some architectural grace, and a lively entertainment scene. In a word, it's hip.

The centre is still under construction but already looks extraordinary. It comprises four vertical cylinders, aptly made from Sheffield steel.

One cylinder is intended as a soundscape auditorium with 200 seats, dedicated to a 3D sound experience of remarkable purity. The second will relate the history of popular music and explain how it affects our lives, focusing on landmarks such as Band Aid. The third will concentrate on the science of mixing music, and the fourth will stage visiting exhibitions and other events such as record fairs and fan-club conventions.

Martyn Ware, a member of the techno god-fathers Heaven 17, and a producer of artists including Tina Turner and Erasure, says: "It's a fantastic idea. A centre that appreciates and celebrates the most popular art form in the world today has long been overdue. It will allow everyone access to an unprecedented depth and breadth of information about popular music."

Everyone will be able to get at least a taste of the sounds on offer. It will be possible to walk in from the street and experience some outer installations for free. Throughout, the environment is designed to meet the needs of all visitors, including those with mobility, sensory and learning impairment.

Chief executive Stuart Rogers stresses that the venture will have a rumbustious side: "We are keen to preserve the outrage of pop because that's always been a part of it, ever since Elvis."

This should convince most groups that inclusion is an accolade, rather than the kiss of death.

"We are at pains to balance out the Anglo-American bias in pop music," Rogers adds. "Modern ambient uses lots of styles of music from different cultures - or, if you look at reggae, it has permeated a whole range of styles, including rap, which is seen as American, whereas in fact it's Jamaican."

In the light of the British Tourist Authority's *Rock & Pop Map of Britain*, published this week (free from travel information centres, or call 01271 336083), the centre looks set to become an instant hit: at least 2,000 visitors a day are anticipated once it is established.

For more information, call 0114-279 8941 or visit the website at <http://www.ncipm.sjfface.co.uk>

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SIMON CALDER

The extraordinary oversubscription of British Airways' "New York for £14" deal that lasted for about three nanoseconds last Wednesday demonstrates our collective soft spot for a bargain. Yet while the phones were overheating, I was trying to find something much more mundane: a flight between London and Glasgow for this weekend. And, in doing so, I discovered that the Internet provides more than a new means of communication; it also gives new meaning to phrases such as "cheap-fare".

British Midland's Cyberseat service claims to be the world's first Internet booking service where you can pay by credit card. What could be better than buying a ticket with a few keystrokes, safe in the knowledge that the screen had promised the cheapest fare available?

For a start, phoning British Midland reservations. On screen, I was assured that the lowest return fare for this weekend was £109. "Total price," promises the screen, until you get to the point of paying, when £10 tax suddenly appears.

Call me sceptical, but I was unconvinced that £119 was the lowest fare available (after all, that represents eight-and-a-half holidays in New York with the BA deal). The century-old technology of the telephone to the rescue. "London to Glasgow? That'll be £94." (Including tax.)

British Midland says its Internet system is directly connected to the reservations mainframe, and it must have been a momentary marketing blip (see also the BA New York offer) that made the £94 fare available. So I tried the next day, and the next, with the same result. Finally I found myself in the peculiar position of trying simultaneously to hook a seat on a plane on the Internet and on the telephone (less

straightforward than it sounds). As the reservations agent was saying "£94", the screen was insisting £25 more.

In the end I called ScotRail and bought a return ticket on the sleeper, for a more modest £79 - £40 less than if I'd trusted the Internet.

Railtrack also has a website, and a handy one it is, too. Rather than wrestling with the 2,000 pages of the National Rail timetable, it can instantly find a way from Penzance to Perth or from Ramsgate to Rhyl.

What it doesn't tell you is how (un)reliable the trains are. I found out the exasperating way, when a short trip from Walsall to Birmingham took nearly twice as long as it should have, successfully obliterating any chance of connecting. In the generous amount of time I had hanging around New Street station (not a habit to be recommended), there is opportunity to study the poster of punctuality figures for Central Trains - yes, I was at a really loose end - which show the sad fact that on a return journey you are more likely than not to be at least 10 minutes delayed.

Birmingham New Street is already the worst place in Britain to change trains: another great con-course discovery was that you have to allow 15 minutes to change trains here, three times longer than most stations. If New Street is the central nervous system for Britain's railways, then it appears to have had a lobotomy.

The whole business of travelling by rail is so complicated that you need all the help you can get. Railtrack obliges with handy posters at Paddington station announcing Impartial Advice. The reason is that several destinations are available from both Paddington, on Great Western, and Waterloo, on South West Trains. After reading the poster, only a fool would go from Waterloo to Exeter by South West Trains: the day return fare is £121.60.

An outrageous amount for a three-hour journey: thank goodness it isn't true. The fares from Waterloo and Paddington are exactly the same, a (still modest) £82. Is it a coincidence that Paddington, in whose ticket office the poster is displayed, is the main base of Great Western Trains?



Lake land: the tower of the Bell of Wishes dominates tiny Bled Island

Photograph: Phil Robinson/RHPL

Time for Bled

What's Croat for 'I'll have another one please?'
David Sims finds out, as he sips his way around Slovenia

Janis Fajfar drives an old yellow Zastava 750 motorcar. It spluttered and hiccupped its way up the steep hills around Bled. He was taking me to Bled Castle for a better view of the oval, emerald-green lake and the Baroque church on its tiny island.

From the castle we looked down at the lake. To one side is the old Bled, Austrian in style. On the other side are characterless Fifties and Sixties concrete buildings. We could see men rowing gondolas across to the island church. The boatmen stand at the stern grasping two large, crossed oars and heave their burdens over the water.

The church is small, but it still manages to cram in six side chapels, a marble pulpit, a high, golden altar and several 15th-century frescoes. "The Church of the Virgin Maria is one of the holiest places of the Slovene people," said Janis.

From the church the Bell of Wishes rang out its doleful tones as tourists strained at the bell rope. "In 1809 our women saved the island from the French. The women heard that French troops were going to plunder the church. So they took all the boats over to the island. The French spent three days finding other boats - and then they rowed themselves to the island. But they realised that they should not touch the gold and silver. So they said that everything in the church belonged to the French government, but it should not be removed. Later, a piece of folk theatre was played all over Austro-Hungary called *The Courageous Women of Bled*, as a symbol of resistance against the French."

I needed courage of a different sort the next day. Practising Croat for "I'll have another one please" at the bar of the Pri Planinca had seemed amusing at the time, but the resulting hangover was brutal. We set off for Radovljica in search of a cure.

The village has a crumbling charm, its medieval houses decorated with frescoes of the area's history. Although the paint is peeling and the colours are fading, I wasn't disappointed - and I found something of a hangover cure in the excellent bar, Gostilna Lectar, where mushroom soup was served in a hollowed-out loaf of bread. Here Janis and I parted company. I gave his car one last push and made for the train to Ljubljana.

Five minutes from the transport hub of Ljubljana, colour smacked me in the eyes: the pink Franciscan Church of the Annunciation, the cream and burgundy geometric patterns on the Co-operative Bank, the Italianate pharmacy where I

bought aspirin folded into white paper.

It is said that wherever you go in the world you will meet kids wearing Michael Jackson T-shirts, and Coke concessionaires doing a roaring trade. Before too long you'll also be able to have a perfectly pulled pint of Guinness. There is an Irish bar in Ljubljana. A new friend, Rok, took me to Patrick's. I was the only Irishman there, and this was the place to be. We fell into conversation with the Prime Minister's secretary, then Rok introduced me to a young journalist who had been jailed for publishing a draft political plan for an independent Slovenia in the late Eighties.

The prison sentence had led to demonstrations as the people of Ljubljana came out on to the streets to support the journalist and his colleagues. It was this protest, I was told, that had led to Slovenia seceding from the crumbling Yugoslavia. "Slainte," I said, and raised my glass.

I was destined for more clinking glasses the next day. Rok and I drove east to Jesenice, the wine-growing region. In a breathtakingly beautiful village, with yellow and pink buildings enhanced by the morning sun, we wandered into a bar which still had a stern Sixties motto: "You will enjoy yourself in our glorious people's republic". Here 'men in pinstriped suits were drinking schnapps and beer. Below their suits were mud-covered shoes. Church bells were ringing as we left; a bride, flanked by her supporters, was walking up the Tamar road. Her husband-to-be was even better supported by his friends - one at each arm - who helped him out of the bar he had just been in.

We pressed on to Ormoz, a few yards from the Croatian border. Here we spent Saturday afternoon on the terraces - where the grapes are grown. Outside, the only sound is the black, black, black of wind rattles used to chase away birds. Inside, it is altogether more convivial in the tiny cellar of Curin Prapotnik we tasted a dozen wines of increasingly good quality, up to ice wine made from grapes picked in the depth of winter.

That evening we were warmly invited to big festivities in town. My imagination had been fired with ideas about wine celebrations and traditional music, so it was with some disappointment that we arrived at the Hotel Ormoz where the band was playing Linda Ronstadt's "Blue Bayon". Far from celebrating Slovenia's cultural past, tonight we were to witness the launch of a new range of Renault cars. As the band struck up the Bellamy Brothers' "Let Your Love Flow" I began to make my excuses, only to find that I was considered to be a VIP. I gave up gracefully and spent the night discussing the relative merits of Slovene beer with an Italian rugby team - also VIPs, as it turned out.

Next morning, on the way to the airport, Rok took me to another village for another schnapps cure. As the sun came out I reflected that if you have never had a Saturday night on the Slovene-Croatian border discussing gassy beers with an Italian rugby team, you've really never had a Saturday night.



BLD BOUND

Getting there: The only direct flights between the UK and Slovenia are operated by Adria Airways (0171-437 0143), which flies non-stop between Heathrow and Ljubljana. The lowest return fare is £239 before April (£262 thereafter), which must be booked one week in advance and should include a Saturday night. There are regular buses between Ljubljana and Bled, taking around 90 minutes to cover the 33-mile journey. Further information: the Slovenian tourist office moved last Monday to 49 Conduit Street, London W1R 9FB (0171-287 7133).

Since 1992, each year we have sent many hundreds of travellers to Northern Cyprus. For a company such as ours, it is the most perfect place to offer our discerning clients, and when describing its attractions it is in fact easier to list what you will not encounter. You will not find Northern Cyprus in the large tour operator's brochures and consequently the number of visitors is relatively small and the tourism development limited.

For some lack of development is a minus, whilst for others it will be the strongest reason for travelling there. In many ways the atmosphere is similar to that you would have experienced in Mediterranean resorts some 30 or 40 years ago before the advent of the package tour. If, like us, you are attracted by places which still have a natural charm, warm and friendly inhabitants, quiet beaches and ancient sites where you may be the only visitor, then Northern Cyprus might be the ideal place for you.

THE ONAR VILLAGE

Of course you will not find a string of deluxe resort hotels, smart shops and all that tourism developers feel are essential for today's traveller. What you will find is a number of small attractive owner-managed hotels scattered in and around Kyrenia and along the coast. For our part we believe the Onar Village to be the best. Located on a hillside about a mile outside of Kyrenia, there are lovely views over the town towards the sea and of the mountains to the rear. The property offers the choice of hotel rooms with private balconies or spacious villas which are scattered throughout the gardens. The villas each have a sitting room, dining area, kitchen, bathroom and bedroom as well as a large private patio. Facilities include a swimming pool, poolside bar, restaurant and library. With a total capacity of 70 or so guests, even when fully booked the Onar Village remains peaceful and uncluttered.

WHEN TO TRAVEL

Our arrangements differ from season to season. For instance in the cooler Spring and Autumn we offer the choice of a guided 7 night tour (Kyrenia & Beyond) which includes excursions each day to ancient Greek and Roman sites, Crusader castles, abbeys and churches as well as the cities of Nicosia and Famagusta. Each departure is accompanied by a guest lecturer, and if the party exceeds 15 travellers, a tour manager will escort the group. Also during this time we operate a 7 night walking tour. Alternatively, you may wish to hire a car and arrange your own excursions.

In the hot summer months of June, July & August we offer 7 or 14 night stays at the Onar Village. These are essentially relax, read a book and potter round in a self drive car holidays.

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Departures: April, May, September and October.

Prices Per Person: From £749 in a twin bedded hotel room (single room supplement £95) and from £789 sharing a villa.

Winter in Kyrenia

Take advantage of the special winter air fares and low season hotel rates available from November through to March, based on a seven night stay on half board.

Prices Per Person: From £419 in a twin bedded hotel room (single room supplement £75) and from £463 sharing a villa.

Summer in Kyrenia

Too hot for some, but if you like the high temperatures of the summer in the Eastern Mediterranean the following will be of interest. The month of June will be the cooler of the three summer months. You have the choice of half board arrangements in the hotel or room only in a villa. Special car hire rates are available from £126 per week.

Departures: June, July and August.

Prices Per Person: From £495 in a twin bedded hotel room (single room supplement £75) and from £463 sharing a villa.



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Chain reaction: one particular growth industry on the slopes is that of nannies and au pairs. The demand comes from ski staff themselves as well as four operators

Victoria Pybus is author of 'Working in Ski Resorts: Europe and North America' (Vacation Work, £10.99).

FAX: 0171 293 2505

[illegible]

Safe in the forest

Welcome to the pleasure dome: whatever your preconceptions, Center Parcs provides a neat package for a half-term break, writes Catherine Stebbings

There is nothing English about Center Parcs, except the weather. The Dutch concept of an eco-friendly, family-oriented holiday camp within a forest is an ingenious one, an idea that can be used in any European country without having to change the formula. What's more, it works. Longleat Forest is no exception – set among some mature redwoods, its 600 little villas are rarely empty, any night of the year.

Center Parcs is designed for families, and is so. Everything is child-friendly and safe. There are no cars, no late-night openings – and security is tight. A maze of forest walks and cycleways is etched across nearly 400 acres, giving everyone a chance to find some peace – but ensuring they are never too far away.



At Longleat the villas may look disconcertingly like Portakabins, but inside they are clean, warm, spacious and highly practical. Though they are crammed together, careful planning assures a degree of privacy.

Facilities are impressive, most of all the massive, glass-domed Plaza. Under one half lies a large piazza complete with restaurants, cafés and shops; under the other half are the spectacular pools, caves and rapids, all set in a subtropical arboretum. Slides and tunnels spew swimmers into underground caverns; waves lap against the mock sea wall; and parents sip cocktails under the palms while their young splash in the shallows or play in the sand. The pools extend outside, culminating in a hair-raising white-water run to the depths below.

At the other end of the forest the Jardins des Sports, a magnificent sports hall, offers everything from tennis and football to Tai chi and fencing. Meanwhile, those

wishing to be pampered could spend their weekend working their way through the range of options available at the Aqua Sana. The visitors

Catherine Stebbings and her husband Jonathan, a teacher, took their daughters Imogen, seven, Polly, six, and Claudia, three.

Catherine: I've always been highly sceptical of pleasure parks, so my heart sank when I saw the rows of unattractive cabins dotted around the forest, and swarms of people heading for the pool. But before long I had entered into the spirit of it all and enjoyed myself immensely. Practically, the park is most impressive; every detail has been carefully thought out and the result is a civilised, safe and healthy environment where children are in heaven. Personally I felt somewhat cocooned in an expensive enclosure, albeit a pleasant one. I would advise people to cater for themselves. We tried a few restaurants and found them all overpriced and lacking in atmosphere.

Jonathan: Overall I was impressed with the breadth and quality of the facilities and activities. Although sophisticated tastes are not catered for in design or food, the purpose of the place – family fun – is fulfilled brilliantly.

With small children, we concentrated on swimming, biking and play areas, but I could see that, when they grow older, the sports centre will be equally satisfying: the various courts and studios are gorgeous. You do need to book extra activities fast. I ended up opting for an introduction to Tai chi, as it was the only thing that wasn't fully booked by Saturday lunch time – but it did provide a relaxing end to the weekend.

Imogen: It was really brilliant, just like being in another country, and the cabins were cosy. There were loads of activities to do but my favourite was the swimming. There were lots of pools inside and out, with trees, rocks and caves. There were masses of slides, and outside there was a really good white-water ride. The water

was really warm, even outside. We swam at night so we could see the stars. Mummy spent her time in the Jacuzzi.

Polly: Center Parcs was really, really good. You could only get to places on this little train or on your bicycle. We rode our bikes everywhere and went for a long bike ride through the forest. There were lots of hills so sometimes I got off, but most of the time I kept up with Mummy and Daddy.

The swimming-pool was really big and warm and the wave machine was on, sometimes. I liked the trees because you felt like you were at the beach. I also went riding Western-style on a little pony through the woods. I saw three deer and my feet got frozen.

Claudia: I had a little bike but I fell off a lot so I went everywhere on Daddy's bike. It was very cold. I loved the swimming-pool. There were lots of slides. I went for a walk behind our house and found some squirrels and a lake with lots of ducks on it.

The deal

How to get there: Center Parcs, Longleat, Warminster, Wiltshire (01985 848000) is signposted off the A36, 3 miles south of Warminster. Nearest intersections are Warminster and Westbury. Other Center Parcs in the UK offering the same facilities are Elveden Forest, Brandon, Suffolk (01623 872 998) and Sherwood, Nottingham (0990 200 300).

Access: cars are allowed for arrival and departure only. Access thereafter is entirely on foot or bike. Cycles, child seats and carriages are available for hire. Expect to cover substantial distances. Disabled access everywhere. Dogs are welcome in designated villas, but they must be kept on a lead and must use the dog toilets, which are few and far between. Prices: costs vary throughout the year and depend on facilities in the villa. A basic villa for six would cost £249 for a three-night stay in January and £474 in August. Price includes villa, electricity etc and unlimited use of the pool complex.

Activities: Numerous children's activities are on offer, including horse-riding, archery, cooking and T-shirt design in the kindergarten.

Child care: There is a baby-sitting service available day and night.

Shops: a reasonably priced supermarket sells a range of essentials and includes a good delicatessen. There are shops for sportswear, children's treats and souvenirs.



In the swim: water slides in the Plaza, above; Imogen Stebbings and palms; left Photographs: John Lawrence

TRAVEL: UK

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THE AUSTRALIAN EXPERIENCE
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GLACIAL ADVENTURE
Arctic Experience (stand 96) have arranged for two people to spend an enthralling five night holiday on Europe's largest glacier - Vatnajökull in Iceland. The winners will enjoy a skidoo journey across the glacier over the three days, where you'll stay in a comfortable mountain lodge at the edge of the glacier. A day will also be spent in an Icelandic 'Super Jeep' travelling from Reykjavik into the highlands, visiting Gullfoss the golden waterfall and Geyser, the hot spring area, en route. Dates subject to availability. The prize includes flights and tours. The holiday can be taken in March and April. Sleeping bag hire is not included but can be arranged. Inclusive of airport tax.

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The future is a can of worms

They're small, they're harmless, and they almost magically turn rubbish into useful compost. Worms are rewarding, as **Daniel Butler** discovers

"Earthworms are amazing creatures – we've been using them to break down our waste for 4,000 years, but it wasn't until the last century that Charles Darwin recognised their value scientifically. He calculated that a worm eats its own body weight each day, and noticed that in doing so it helps drain and neutralise the soil."

Heather Gorringe breeds millions of such worms on her Herefordshire farm, and runs a thriving business based around their subterranean life-cycle. Not surprisingly, she is a huge fan of the invertebrates, but this hasn't always been the case: "I've always been a bit of a tomboy, and liked getting my hands dirty, but I'd never really thought much about worms until we had a problem with sheep manure on my father's smallholding," she says.

It was while she was contemplating this problem that she stumbled across an obscure book on worm composting in the local library. This prompted her to begin some clumsy experiments using stock bought from a local angling shop, only to be amazed by the results. Within months her charges had converted a huge pile of manure into top-quality soil conditioner. "It would have taken two years to rot down conventionally," she says. "But the worms managed it in three months."

Here was something that was interesting, fun and a talking-point to the local pub. "I was looking for something rewarding to do," Heather continues, "and this seemed to be it."

So began Wiggly Wiggles, the company Heather founded to market worm-based composting. At first she worked mainly with farmers and local authorities, but as the business grew she branched into the domestic market, selling worm-filled bins suitable for modern kitchens. The business took off and, following her marriage in 1992, Heather moved with her beloved worms into her husband's farm at Blakemore, near Hay-on-Wye.

One of the core attractions of warrens, of course, is that they are small. Huge numbers can be housed in a confined space; perfect for a crowded world. As a result Wiggles are also suitably compact – although the company has a turnover of £150,000. Apart from a small office on the first floor of the main farmhouse, it occupies just a small stable block and half of a small, concreted yard where the breeding stock of three indigenous species do their stuff in a 20-yard-long pyramid of cow dung. “We want the business to grow, but whatever happens, we want to stay based here,” says Heather.

So far at least, growth has been rapid – increasing by around 50 per cent each year, and Wiggly Wiggles now has three full- and two part-timers, all of whom are women. When quizzed about this imbalance of the sexes, Heather simply giggles. “I’ve no idea why we’re all women – it’s simply the way things have gone.”

In general the bulk of the company's business comes from composting. Domestic kits form the most important elements of this, ranging from a £8.45 bag of 350 worms to kick-start a compost heap, to £74.90 for a kitchen-based "Can O Worms". The last is an ingenious stack of sieves through which the worms climb, while their casts drop to the bottom. When the lowest layer is full, it is removed, emptied and returned to the top.

A third of all composting business comes from local authorities. Some councils want to give subsidised bins to ratepayers (although Heather is averse to giving them away free: "Unless people pay for something they don't appreciate it, and the worms can suffer," she says). Others want worms to boost red beds planted below landfill sites to break down leaching effluent, while an important minority need help dealing with dog excrement – although trials so far have been inconclusive: "Worms appear to break this down very well, but so far we can't absolutely guarantee they will neutralise the bacteria and parasites which make dog excrement such a problem," explains Heather. "One of the main driving forces behind all this is a desire to do something positive for the environment," she adds.

Her colleagues are equally enthusiastic. "Do you realise that the average household creates between 200 and 250kg of waste a year that a worm would regard as edible?" says Louise Hayes, Wiggle Wigglers marketing manager. "In Australia, six per cent of homes have a Can O Worms. If we followed, can you imagine what impact it would have on the amount of rubbish we tip into the ground each year?" Better still, the final result of the worms' munching is a valuable product in its own right, prized by serious gardeners as the best compost available. The going rate is £1 a litre for the crumbly black soil, compared with 10p for conventional, peat-based alternatives.

At the other end of the scale, Heather feels worms could play an important part to play in land reclamation. Worms secrete calcium as they eat, neutralising acid soil and increasing the soil's humus content. This reduces water flow through the soil and helps to stabilise pollution from slag heaps and disused industrial sites – particularly when used in conjunction with trees.

According to Louise Hayes, it is the educational aspect of worm-farming that the staff find most rewarding – and customer satisfaction: “The wonderful thing about a worm kit is that it is working all the time,” she enthuses. “There is always something to look at – a bit of liquid, some compost and lots of slithering. It makes worms an ideal classroom educational tool.”

Wiggly Wiggles 01981-500391 - or visit www.mystworld.com/wiggles



Slithery business: worms from a Wiggly Wiggles composting kit.

Photograph: John Lawrence

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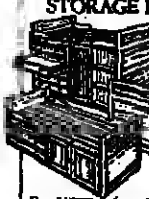
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Secrets of a muted hooter

You seldom see long-eared owls – which is why one man's quest to find out more about Britain's most secretive bird of prey turned into a feat of endurance, writes Matthew Brace

A deep hoot in the night – like air blowing over the top of a glass bottle – signals the presence of one of Britain's rarest and most beautiful owls. Secretive and strictly nocturnal, the long-eared owl (*asio otus*) is at home in woods near rough grassland. Its reclusive nature and excellent camouflage make it devilishly hard to find, which has meant previous studies of this species have been difficult – and results limited.

However, recent research by Robert Williams of the University of East Anglia in Norwich has revealed important new information about this elusive bird of prey. Dr Williams has found more evidence to suggest that Britain has a self-supporting resident population but also fears that the bird is suffering a decline in numbers.

A self-supporting resident population has been suspected by scientists and ornithologists but Dr Williams's evidence is the strongest yet to prove it exists. "There have been records of long-eared owls here for years. All the places in East Anglia ending in Hoo were named after the call of the male long-eared owl," Dr Williams said. "It was not known whether all the winter migrants returned to Scandinavia in the spring or whether some stayed here to breed."

Many long-eared owls still make that perilous journey each spring from Britain to their northern breeding grounds. Their numbers vary from year to year, with peaks every three to five years. But Dr Williams discovered that those owls living in southern England, where prey is more consistent and reliable, seem to be resident year-round.

"If it is a particularly poor year for prey or an especially harsh winter, the resident birds will moderate their breeding and maybe not even breed at all," he said.

During his PhD study, Dr Williams also discovered that long-eared owls have lower juvenile and adult survival rates than tawny owls, which are doing well at the moment, and that the UK population was dwindling, with the major causes of death being predation, starvation and bad weather, as well as increasing numbers being killed on the road.

"They do seem to have declined this century. We don't know what their natural level is because they are so secretive, but the Victorian naturalists talked about them as if they were much more widespread than they are today."

"The naturalist CB Ticehurst said they were more common in parts of the south than the tawny owl," Dr Williams added. "As the tawny has increased in numbers recently, the long-eared owl has appeared to decline. We still don't know if there is a connection between the two. We also know about the decline from local country bird reports. They don't breed at all in Cornwall and there are very few pairs in the south west of England. It is estimated there are between 1,000 and 10,000 pairs in the UK now. My guess would be around 2,000 pairs."

The chief reason behind the decline is the problem affecting many bird species – agricultural and land-use changes which have meant the destruction of the hickthorn scrub and fenland of the long-eared owl's natural habitat. The owl is a vole specialist and relies on this rough grassland for hunting.

Dr Williams is keen to draw attention to the plight of the species and possibly get it registered as a bird of concern. During his three-year

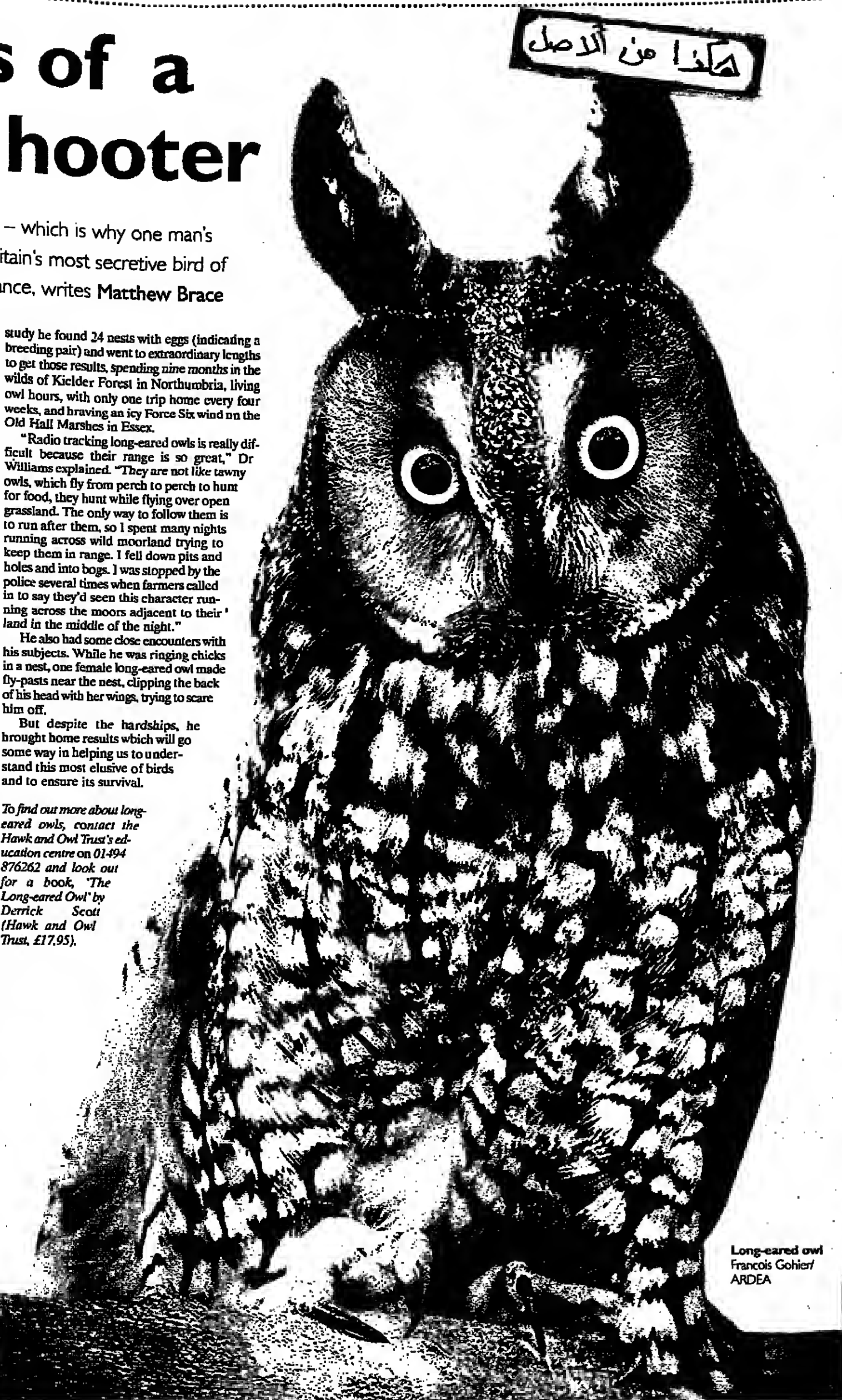
study he found 24 nests with eggs (indicating a breeding pair) and went to extraordinary lengths to get those results, spending nine months in the wilds of Kielder Forest in Northumbria, living owl hours, with only one trip home every four weeks, and braving an icy Force Six wind on the Old Hall Marshes in Essex.

"Radio tracking long-eared owls is really difficult because their range is so great," Dr Williams explained. "They are not like tawny owls, which fly from perch to perch to hunt for food, they hunt while flying over open grassland. The only way to follow them is to run after them, so I spent many nights running across wild moorland trying to keep them in range. I fell down pits and holes and into bogs. I was stopped by the police several times when farmers called in to say they'd seen this character running across the moors adjacent to their land in the middle of the night."

He also had some close encounters with his subjects. While he was ringing chicks in a nest, one female long-eared owl made fly-pasts near the nest, clipping the back of his head with her wings, trying to scare him off.

But despite the hardships, he brought home results which will go some way in helping us to understand this most elusive of birds and to ensure its survival.

To find out more about long-eared owls, contact the Hawk and Owl Trust's education centre on 01494 876262 and look out for a book, 'The Long-eared Owl' by Derrick Scott (Hawk and Owl Trust, £17.95).



Long-eared owl
François Gohier/
ARDEA

Basil's unhappy brush with the town

Are urban foxes being dumped in the country? asks Duff Hart-Davis

Foxes are beautiful creatures and great survivors, but there is also an element of mystery about them. No doubt this is mainly because they rarely show themselves during the day; a faintly sinister reputation also leads to stories such as those about how they appear sitting in graveyards when celebrated hunting men are about to die.

Country folk take a keen interest in foxes at all times, and eagerly report sightings to each other. So when an animal's behaviour seems out of character, word flashes round.

The latest strange story comes from John and Janet Thomas, who live at Monstey Farm, near Ludlow. One evening at about 7pm, a friend called to see their son Edward, who runs the farm. The visitor came in leaving the back door open.

Hard on his heels, a fox shot into the house and ran up the stairs. When Edward went after it, he was amazed to see it sitting on the landing, cool as any house cat; but when he chased it into his parents' bedroom it took fright and raced round on top of the furniture, scattering ornaments and piddling on furniture and walls.

In the end Edward managed to smother the animal under a coat, hit it between the eyes with a hammer and carry it outside into the barn, where he left it, supposing it to be dead. His father, returning from work elsewhere, found the house "in pandemonium", with bedding and pillows being thrown out for burning. Then, in the morning, great was Edward's surprise when he discovered that his victim had got up and gone.

To the Thomas family, it seemed obvious that this was an urban fox, possibly a pet, which somebody had dumped out in the country. They assumed it had come to the dustbins by the back door in search of food, reasoning that no normal fox would ever have run into the lighted doorway. Still less would a wild animal have sat at the top of the stairs and watched a human being approaching.

Their theory is backed up by another farmer, who regularly shoots more than 100 foxes a year in one valley, and has dispatched 14 in the past month alone. The animals have all been in good condition, but they are half-fame, and bigger and redder than local foxes, which tend to have rather grey coats.

This farmer is convinced that foxes are being caught in some nearby town – possibly Birmingham, only 30 miles away – and turned out of vans at night to fend for themselves. Many other people share his conviction that this dumping is going on; the number of foxes in circulation seems outrageous, and many show signs of disorientation, hanging about in the open in broad daylight.

Yet experts deny that this is happening. Professor Stephen Harris, who has made an intensive study of foxes in Bristol, dismisses the idea as nonsense. He agrees that there was a time, in the Seventies, when some London councils used to release captured animals into the countryside, but he says that the practice has long ceased.

He should know, because until recently Bristol had the densest fox population of any city in Britain. In its heyday, four or five years ago, Professor Harris estimated that there were 700 mature foxes in the city, plus about 900 cubs born each year. Some 20 per cent of these animals were marked with ear-tags, and no single ear-tag has ever been returned from outside the city.

Further, the professor points out that "mythical van-loads of foxes" would be exceedingly hard to assemble. "How would you collect so many at once?" he asks. "How would you feed them? How would you get them all into the van?"

His scepticism is seconded by John Haines, a freelance pest-control expert who has worked in Bristol for seven years. He has caught hundreds of foxes in cage-traps, but always puts them down humanely with a silenced .22, and is "totally against" the idea of releasing them into the countryside. Translocating wild animals is not illegal, but he



PETER COOK

reckons it would cause a fox a high level of stress and suffering – and in any case, a strange animal set down in the territory of other foxes would probably be bounded out, and starve.

If dumping does occur, it is the act of soft-hearted but hypocritical householders, who wish to be rid of an animal that has taken up residence under their garden shed, but do not want to be responsible for its death. Whatever fate befalls a captured urban fox, its removal is not cheap: the cost of trapping and taking it away is at least £150.

Now, however, Bristol has practically no foxes at all, for in the past two years virulent mange has swept up from the Somerset Levels and killed 97 per cent of the city's vulpine population. The disease is moving on up-country. Here, 25 miles to the north, we have at least one many fox that is causing concern, as the disease can be transmitted to dogs and cats by mites on bushes or fence-wire.

Normal, healthy foxes, as I say, are part and parcel of country life; but animals that are sick, or behaving strangely, arouse no mean disquiet.

£2,000 to the rescue: one guillemot, or an acre of meadow ...

This week's report on the environmental aftermath of the 1996 Sea Empress oil disaster has thrown a question mark over the value of rehabilitating injured wild animals. The independent panel of scientists concluded that almost none of the rescued oiled seabirds survived washing and return to the wild: 40 per cent died before or during the cleaning process and 97 per cent of those returned to the wild were dead within two months.

Treating oiled birds costs about £40, and given the report's grim survival figures, it might be supposed that the rehabilitators would now be questioning the theories that underpin their work. Not a bit of it, apparently. "I don't care if it costs £2,000 to put just one bird back into the wild – it's fully justified. These animals are injured for unnatural reasons and it's our duty to try to put right the damage," Graham Cornick, who runs Hydestile Wildlife Hospital, is adamant that money should never be an issue when it comes to rehabilitating wild animals: "We've never put an animal down for financial reasons, ever."

"If you're going to be brutal, it's largely a waste of time," counters Dr Simon Lyster, director-general of the Wildlife Trusts. "Resources should go to something more sustainable – like a nature reserve, or a campaign to persuade farmers to be environmentally sensitive."

These two committed animal lovers clearly have radically

Rescuing wounded animals is worthy – but, asks Daniel Butler, could the money be better spent?

different positions. The "welfarist" Cornick believes man's duty is to try to rectify the distortions he creates, while in contrast the "conservationist" Lyster views the grander perspective: "It is difficult to think of any species that would benefit from the return of the occasional individual," he says. "But it is easy to find examples where just a few acres would make a significant difference – for example, 97 per cent of our flower-rich hay meadows have disappeared. The £2,000 that Mr Cornick might spend on one casualty would buy an acre of this."

So what good do our animal rescue centres really do? "Rehabilitation is a drop in the ocean, and will never have any practical impact on our wildlife," says Pauline Kidner, who runs a badger hospital in Somerset. "I do it because I enjoy it, not because I think I'm altering the fate of badgers generally." Likewise, Britain's biggest animal welfare charity, the RSPCA, tries to steer a median line. "Animals are brought in because they're in trouble," says Peter Budd, veterinary manager at the West Hatch hospital. "We patch them up for a second chance where we can, but they've got to be 100 per cent fit if they're going to have any hope at all." As a result, he

says, he would put down any amputee: "It's lost its competitive edge, and once back in the wild will fail fairly rapidly."

Jim Chick, chairman of the Hawk Board, which advises the Government on issues affecting British raptors, believes most casualties should either be returned quickly or put down: "There are far too many one-eyed, one-winged birds mouldering away in aviaries," he says. "Most have no quality of life and it would be much more humane to put them down immediately." But in spite of this hard-nosed pragmatism, he has returned hundreds of birds to the wild at considerable personal cost, knowing their chances to be poor. "Nature is brutal, and 75 per cent of young raptors die in their first year anyway. Most birds brought in to me were found because they simply weren't able to cut the mustard. I hope my returnees made it – but however hard I try, I can't change the way things are."

The scriptwriter and animal rights activist Carla Lane, who runs Animal Aid, disagrees violently with what she sees as this heartless line: "We have eight seagulls here which can't fly," she says. "The RSPCA told me to put them down because they would have no quality of life, but we gave them the walled

herb garden, with a pond and ladders up to perches. Three years later they're happy and bright-eyed because they can bathe, eat and do everything a seagull normally does except fly." In addition, Animal Aid has pairs of crippled blackbirds and hedgehogs, both of which breed successfully. "They learn to live with these problems – there's absolutely no need to put them down," says Lane.

"Most animals live about five times as long in captivity as in the wild; people forget that nature is very brutal," counters Chris Mead, of the British Trust for Ornithology. "What really matters is not how long an animal lives, but whether it is playing its part in the grander scheme of things. The healthy chaffinch I watch from my kitchen window may be food for a sparrowhawk a minute later. But even in death it is boosting the chances that the hawk will raise young successfully. The 'happy' captive animal is merely existing; it is not playing its proper part in the food chain."

There are frictions elsewhere. Alien muntjac deer, introduced accidentally at the turn of the century, are now common across southern Britain and cause immense damage in the handful of remaining lowland coppices. The speed of their spread is believed to be due, in part, to well-intentioned rehabilitators releasing casualties into new areas. Similar problems have been reported with squirrels,

foxes and even hedgehogs.

Perhaps the worst problems occur with barn owls, however: "Until recently there were real problems with people breeding injured owls and releasing the young," explains Chick. "Not only were virtually all of the youngsters dying without their parents to help them, but those that managed to survive were seriously disrupting the breeding chances of existing pairs." Indeed, the situation became so grave that the law had to be changed to require release schemes to be licensed.

But although many reserves have been badly affected by the consequences of such actions, Dr Lyster says rehabilitation is important: "It would be unconscionable not to do something for an injured animal," he says. "Who knows, the child who nurses a hedgehog back to life may be next the next David Attenborough – and in the long run that could be of immense value to many other species."

Similarly, although Mead's research suggests that only 1 per cent of oiled seabirds survive a return to the wild, he thinks it vital to try: "We should never get into the situation where no one bothers," he says. "The sight of an oil-soaked bird being washed puts enormous pressure on the oil companies to improve their act; just don't fall into the trap of thinking it will help that particular bird."

هَذَا مِنْ الْأَصْلِ

Potted history

Britain has the richest heritage of historic gardens in the world, but urgently needs more training to support them. Anna Pavord reports on one important scheme



A large ginger tomcat was asleep in a basket on the windowsill of the gardeners' bothy at Cragside, Northumberland. Lunch boxes and plant catalogues covered the wooden table. Ten plants of the season were lined up in jam jars on a shelf, each one carefully labelled with its Latin name and its proper botanical family. This was the week's homework for the 18-year-old trainee gardener who had just joined the workforce at Cragside, the extraordinary house and garden that was laid out towards the end of the last century by the armaments manufacturer Sir William Armstrong. It now belongs to the National Trust.

It all seemed deliciously cosy. It lulled me into feeling that everything was still as we imagine it used to be, when young gardeners worked through practical apprenticeships under the guidance of an experienced head gardener and the patronage of a philanthropic owner. But, of course, it isn't. Philanthropists are thin on the ground these days. Although gardening has never been higher on the national agenda, providing good training for gardeners has become ever more of a problem.

I went to Cragside to see Alison Pringle, who was 26 when she decided on an abrupt career change, and was swept into

the first of the National Trust's three-year training programmes for gardeners. How did it happen? Alison already had a degree in fine arts and was working as a freelance etcher. "My studio was in a factory unit in a fairly rundown area of Newcastle. I never saw daylight. I just felt it was no way to live. Then by chance I saw this article in *Cosmopolitan* about women who worked outdoors. 'If only,' I thought."

But nobody could show her how to do it. She already had one degree and didn't want another paper qualification. She wanted to learn by experience, the way garden apprentices used to. She didn't want to ride round on a tractor all day, mowing sports pitches. She wanted more from the job than manual labour. That's when she saw the advertisement for the Trust's training programme, which they call "careership". She was lucky to get in. The Trust can fund only eight students a year, and six of the places are reserved for people under 20. Each student is assigned to a particular garden, carefully chosen to provide a wide range of experience. They are also committed to 10 weeks' study at Bickton College in Devon, where the Trust has arranged courses tailor-made for the kind of work their gardeners are likely to tackle. Ordinary courses in "amenity horticulture", as it is chillingly called, take little account of the needs of historic gardens.

"I think the Trust took a gamble on me," says Alison. "I had bright purple hair, extremely long fingernails and luminous trousers." But she has been spectacularly successful in her second career, and is now assistant head gardener at Cragside, responsible for propagating all their plants. By some miracle, she's even managed to hang on to her fingernails, though the hair has calmed down. She didn't want to clash with the summer bedding.

"A culture shock", is how she describes her first months as a trainee. "I had no idea how much was involved - especially with historic gardens. It adds a whole new layer to all the basic things you have to know: historic techniques of gardening, principles of design." All the careership students (at 26, she was relieved that she wasn't the oldest)

went off together to do their block release courses and, in their final year, were encouraged to arrange exchanges between each other's gardens. "We got paid, and we got the professional qualifications," explains Alison, "but it was the practical experience that was the key for me on this scheme."

Had the job turned out to be what she hoped? "Oh, far more than I was hoping," she replies. "I love plants, and here I'm responsible for bringing on at least 50,000 plants a year. We don't have much in our budget for buying new plants."

Stoicism is an important qualification for the job, she says. There are so many things outside your control that, as a gardener, you have to learn to accept. And patience. "I fall down there," she confesses. "I'm always poking at my seed pans, wanting to hurry the seeds on." Most of all, she acknowledges the contribution of Cragside's head gardener, Andrew Sawyer. "It's a huge commitment on their part to take on a student. They have to remember to involve them in everything that's going on. It's up to them to make sure the student gets as wide a spread of experience as possible."

So, as far as Alison is concerned, the Trust's careership scheme has been a success. But each student costs the Trust £10,000 a year. They would like to expand the programme, but they don't have the money. They would like private owners to

join them in offering placements for trainee gardeners, but there have been few offers. The Historical Royal Palaces have joined in, and so have English Heritage, but there are still big gaps in the network.

Despite the extraordinary richness of our historic parks and gardens (the Trust alone owns 160), there is no properly funded centre of excellence devoted to their history, care and upkeep. There is no central clearing-house that Alison could use to guide her towards what she wanted to do. The Heritage Lottery Fund has voted a generous £57m towards an urban parks initiative, and the money is badly needed; parks are vital lungs in Britain's cities. But there is nowhere for the people responsible for Britain's parks to go, to get advice about the best way to spend their windfall. There are no courses tailored to provide gardeners with as good a grasp of the historic significance of urban parks as they have of turf care or tractor maintenance.

Parks have suffered badly in the wake of "compulsory competitive tendering" (CCT), which focuses people's minds on a figure at the end of a balance sheet. But there are many different ways of doing sums. Before CCT, the parks provided the best practical training on offer for young would-be gardeners. Nobody minded that, when fully fledged, they might move out of the public sector into private gardens.

The view was that wherever they went, the training would not be wasted.

But a requirement to provide similar opportunities for training has never been written into the park contracts that local councils put out for tender. Often the contracts go to landscapers based hundreds of miles away from the parks they contract to look after. You can't put a figure on the local pride, and the local distinctiveness, that come from employing local people to look after their own landscapes. But the loss is obvious to everybody.

Recognising the gap left after the collapse of the parks apprenticeships, the Trust has tailored a scheme ideally suited to this country's vast inheritance of historic gardens, but can't find the money to expand it. The Professional Gardeners Guild, in a separate initiative, also sponsors one trainee gardener who spends a year in each of three different gardens. Beyond that, a great black hole looms.

We are constantly told that we have the richest heritage of gardens on earth. But who is going to care for them, come the millennium?

For details about the National Trust's careership scheme, send an s.a.e. to John McKernall, c/o Regional Office, Llanhydrock, Bodmin, Cornwall PL30 4DE. Training starts each September.



Alison Pringle at Cragside, top and above Photos: Will Walker/North News

CUTTINGS

"Why do you have it in for so poor old Agnes?" asks Brian Glover, of London SW12. I wrote recently that I'd heaved my recalcitrant 'Agnes' rose on to the bonfire when, after years and years of waiting, it had failed to give me a single flower.

"I planted a bush at least 15 years ago in my mother's garden in windswept Merseyside," he continues. "It's in rather a thankless part of the garden (I was younger then, and crueler), dank soil, competition from an ancient hawthorn hedge, not much sunlight and still, twice a year, it puts on a creditable show of blossom. As a passionate gardener without a garden, I travel up there almost every month - and usually catch its flowering."

"Its first flowering is quite early (end of May, early June) and the most profuse. The flowers, though not large, are of the most beautiful colour and have a raspberries scent which I have not met in any other rose. Its second blooming is usually in August to September, when the flowers are fewer, but bigger and just as scented."

"The shrub does indeed grow lankily (not helped by being sun-starved, I suspect) and it throws suckers. When it all gets too much I back it right down like other rugosa roses and it springs back, maybe missing one of its bloomings, but never seriously bothered. It has probably been fed two or three times in its life (I must try to remember to do it this spring). It never

gets any diseases (the rugosa blood, I dare say) so doesn't need spraying. "All in all, I'd say 'Agnes' has proved her worth. I got her from David Austin's nursery. Maybe I've just been lucky, but I felt I should write in defence of a much-maligned rose."

The latest edition of *'Tree News'* unravels a mystery that has puzzled Janeites for some time. It occurs in *Emma*, when, on the day before the fatal Box Hill picnic, Emma visits Donwell Abbey and finds the orchard in blossom. Nothing odd in that, you might think, except that Austen makes clear this is "almost midsummer". Euan Nisbet, professor of geology at the University of London, has discovered that this is not as strange as it seems. He checked weather records in an early book on meteorology, *The Climate of London*, by Luke Howard, and discovered that the spring of 1814, the year Austen started to write *Emma*, was exceptionally cold. In the late, cold spring of 1996, apple trees were still in bloom in early June. The spring of 1814, apparently, was even later and colder, so blossom may not have appeared until midsummer. Austen, always a stickler for accuracy, has not made a boob. *Tree News* is published twice a year by the Tree Council, 51 Catherine Place, London SW1E 6DY (0171-828 9928).

Coffee connects a series of events arranged by the Royal Botanic Garden,

Edinburgh, between Tuesday and Friday next week. A free exhibition in the Caledonian Hall (Tues-Fri, 11am-3.30pm) includes exhibits from coffee traders and importers, with tastings going on all day. In the lecture theatre on Tuesday, Harvey Grieve talks about the subtleties of growing and roasting the bean, while RBG guides are on hand to point out coffee plants growing in the botanic garden's glasshouse. This event starts at 3pm and tickets cost £10. For information on "Coffee Connections", contact Sharon Kirk at the Royal Botanic Garden (0131-552 71871).

Kew's annual orchid festival opens today with thousands of spectacular orchids on display in the Princess of Wales conservatory. The theme of this year's display is "Islands of Enchantment", the title drawing attention to the many endangered orchids that grow in islands round the world and the work being done to ensure their survival. In the micropropagation laboratories at Kew, scientists have learnt how to clone rare orchids, to protect species from extinction. There are 25,000 different kinds of wild species orchid, and the Kew collection is recognised as the best in the world. The festival runs until 29 March, with study days for beginners on 17 and 26 March and flower-arranging demonstrations on 5 and 11 March.

Anna Pavord

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Paint your own monogram

Ever thought you could do better at designing a dinner service than many of the professionals? Sally Staples checked out a china-painting class – and found it was fun

My image of china-painting stemmed from a visit, long ago, to an arts and crafts exhibition where stern-looking, grey-haired ladies demonstrated how to cover a teacup with delicate flowers in a series of deft brush-strokes. The spectacle was riveting, because each stroke formed a perfect petal or leaf. Their hands never wobbled, the colour never smudged, and the observer might have concluded that these women had either been practising their art for decades, or had been born with an extraordinary talent for steady precision.

With this in mind, I wondered what kind of people would have the courage to enrol on a course in china-painting. Would even the beginners display an innate artistry? Would the first week's handiwork look good enough to sell?

The atmosphere turned out to be far from intimidating. The students were all women, and most of the class were elderly housewives with varying degrees of artistic ability. They were there to have some fun, and not even the tutor, Hazel Faithful, wanted to paint petals on teacups with that robotic rapidity I had remembered.

"We try to aim for a more modern approach to china-painting," she said. "A lot of people come on this course because they want to do something practical without getting too messy. Some of them have a background in painting, which can help – but it isn't necessary."

"Quite often the students want to paint

a set of dinner plates with a design or motif. They want to get a result quite quickly, and take something home. I try to stop them going ahead too fast, so that they acquire some basic skills first."

Each week, Hazel gives a demonstration on some aspect of china-painting, then the students work on their own projects while she goes round the class giving advice and guidance.

On my visit she was teaching them the importance of mixing paint. This comes in powder form, in small sachets weighing about 10 grams each. It is used sparingly and mixed with turps and differing amounts of clove and lavender oil, depending on the texture of paint required.

The paints have a cadmium or selenium content and some colours such as pink, red and purple contain a gold element, which puts the price up to around £11.50 per sachet. On that basis, it is clearly cheaper to start experimenting with blues and greens.

Hazel explained that the rules of mixing these paints are different from those governing watercolours. For instance, mixing blue and yellow will invariably produce a muddy brown, rather than green. The colours used on china may also need to be fired in a kiln at different temperatures; it is important, when using a combination of colours, to know what the firing requirements are.

One of the most skilled in the class was

Marsha Arrad, who was working on a set of dinner plates. She spent the morning painting a green stem with leaves on to two plates, which were then left to be fired in the kiln. In the next class she would add different-coloured flowers to the stems.

Mireille Robertson had a set of cups and saucers that she was painting cobalt blue, using a sponge instead of a brush to achieve a marbled effect. Untroubled by any intricate design, she worked speedily, and covered four cups and saucers in no time.

Peggy Powell-Brett, who is in her second year of china-painting, said she still gets

nerotic about everything she does. In fact, her work is impressively accurate. That day she was tracing the outline of a kingfisher on to a plain white plate, and had begun to mix colours to paint the bird's breast and back.

"I started off painting ashtrays and jugs, bowls and mugs, and giving them as presents," she said. "For Christmas I gave my daughter a set of dinner plates. It is a satisfying way of producing presents."

Muriel Lasry was working on a clown design, which she planned to paint on to a plate for her three-year-old daughter. "Coming to these classes makes a break

from the household chores, and a chance to spend two hours doing something for myself," she said. "Mostly I make things for my children; when they are older they will have a collection of mugs and plates they can keep."

The basic materials for china-painting are minimal: a bottle of turps, some surgical gloves, natural sponges, brushes, palette knives, a quill pen and a wipe-out pen for the inevitable mistakes. Hazel has a good stock of paint and china available for students to buy. A 10-inch white dinner plate costs £2.85, but she says that bargain can also be picked up in many stores.

What most of these women enjoyed about china-painting was having an end product, and not needing to be an artistic genius to produce it. As one student said, while labouring away with the sponge technique: "When this plate is finished I shall use it for little cakes and tarts – whatever it looks like. With luck the next one may be better."

Hazel Faithful's 10-week courses at Kensington and Chelsea College, London (0171-573 5333) cost between £50 and £60. She also offers private courses in London (0171-253 5733).



Colouring up: there are distinct rules for mixing china paint – blue and yellow, for example, will result in brown rather than green. Photograph: Rui Xavier

GAMES

This is the concluding part of Chris Maslanka's survey, begun last week. (See key at end for notes and game-type ratings.)

The simplicity and versatility of the word game *Scrabble* have enabled it to sweep the board, selling more than 100 million copies in over 120 countries since the 1930s. Books are written on it and its many forms attest to its popularity. I once even saw a sad character playing it on his own on a train. This *Travel Scrabble de Luxe* (Mattel, 2-4 players, aged 8+ years, RRP £15, would have cheered him up at least as much as a playmate. It is compact and can be folded away with the tiles locked in place and so is ideal for travellers. (Rating: p, Z)

I suspect *Anagram* (competitive word play, 2-8 players of all ages, Oxford Games Ltd, RRP £5.95) may not prove everyone's cup of tea, though it is enjoyable enough if you can spell well, love anagrams and have a competitive streak, but it's certainly not a game for dyslexics! (Rating: p, Z)

If in *Tom Brown's School Days* you found yourself siding with the bullies, *Power* (2-4 players aged 10 or over) might just be your thing. The instructions are complicated but become clear as the game progresses, the object being to attack other countries and capture their flags utilising all the air power, tanks, ships and personnel at your disposal. In the battle-hardened opinions of Gary (12), John (10) and Dan (10) it was their favourite game. (Rating: ff, v)

WHAT TO PLAY ON COLD WINTER EVENINGS

CHRIS MASLANKA

Yali (strategy game for two, Falcon, about £19.99) is an engaging and successful balancing game for all the family. Ball-bearings are loaded into a seesaw structure which reacts counter-intuitively: the way in which it tips determines the next move. Gary and Julie (both 12) played it as a game of chance with little insight into what made it tip. Their parents continued long after the children had gone to bed in the hope of deducing the strategy that ensures a win and graduation to a higher level of play. Curiously addictive and an all-round favourite. (Rating: p, Z)

Spite (Board and dice game for 2-6 players or teams of more than 6, Lagoon Games, RRP £9.99), despite its name, proved hugely enjoyable. Players gradually collect enough counters to cover the letters of the word *SPITE* but also get a chance to demolish the work of others. For adults it is fun and emotion-releasing to the point of being therapeutic, but a word of caution: younger children can become quite upset when ganged up on. I had visions of Enfield's Old Gits coming to blows over this one. (Rating: f, vv)

Mancala (Lagoon Games, £9.99, board game of strategy for two players aged 7 to adult) is a version of the ancient game known as *Mankala* as played in the coffee shops of Egypt, or as *Pallanguli* as played by the Tamils of Southern India. The seeds have been replaced by glass stones in this beautifully-packaged coffee-table version and it is a great game to gossip

and relax to as the advantage veers from one player to the other. (Rating: p, Z)

Lager-laddishness is too often a celebration of pre-verbal behaviour, so *Booze Cruise* (trivia based, board game, Lagoon Games RRP £19.99) came as a pleasant surprise. Although the aim is to rack up five brewery visits, the questions on drink, travel, culture and trivia are no pushover. For example: (1) Which is the only national flag that has a map of the country on it? And (2) What was invented after Percy Spencer found a melted chocolate bar in his pocket after passing a magnetron in 1945? For answers see below.

A selection of the drinks named in the game were served as we played so I only remember starting the game. Will suit those characters who take their drink seriously (those who can only direct you to places by means of the pubs that lie along the route). Only give to alcoholics anonymously. (Rating: f, v)

Chronology (2-6 players aged 7 or over, Spear's RRP £20) A reminiscence game, perhaps better suited to the chronologically challenged, intent on reliving the past, or those with an interest in history. The game stretches back to 1066, which should be one in the eye for other reminiscence games. Was "Love me Do" recorded before or after JFK was assassinated? (For answer see 3 below.) (Rating: f, v)

The desire to murder house guests and family can be sublimated by a Murder Mystery Game. Unlike *Nativity* plays

these all have different plots and you don't know from the outset how they will end up. Murder à la Cartier's *The Brie, The Bullet & the Black Cat* (10-12 consenting adults) is a fantasy role play game set in 1942 Casablanca. Participants with wonderfully ridiculous names – Cherie Boot, Countess Bogov, Seamus O'Hack – have to deduce which one of them killed The Black Cat, France's greatest mime artist. The set includes invitations, party plan with suggested menus, character booklets and a cassette to give the guests motive and motivation: a fail-safe way to spend a hilarious evening. (Rating: ff, v)

When the dust has settled from all the socialising you may need to re-centre yourself in solitude by ensconcing yourself in a comfortable chair to ootemplate, as did the monks of old, the knot-work in *The Celtic Knot Puzzle* (Oxford Games, £6.95) or, if you lean more to the East, the hundreds of patterns obtainable from the seven tiles in *300 Tangrams* (Puzzle and Book, age 8 years to adult: Lagoon Games, RRP £10). Don't worry: long before you've exhausted all the possible ways of configuring the seven tiles it will be time to buy more games for next Christmas. (Rating: p, Z)

ANSWERS: 1) Cyprus; 2) The microwave oven; 3) The Beatles hit came out in 1962, the year before JFK was killed. Noise levels: p – quiet, f – noisy, ff – disturb the neighbours. Risk of game rage: Z – almost irritatingly inoffensive v – read carefully; vv – have a Relate counsellor on hand.

PANDORA MELLY

GAMES PEOPLE PLAY ON VALENTINE'S DAY

Dame Barbara Cartland, 96, writer

I've always played a lot of tennis, of course, and a little golf. And I rode a lot at one time. Not any more: not at my age!

These days, I write a book every fortnight. My secretary types it out, and then she reads the chapter back before we start the next one. You must tell people that, because I've told one or two men about it, and they've all said, "What a good idea, I've never thought of that."

I started writing when we came to live in London. A friend of mine said: "Look, I've just started working for Lord Beaverbrook. You are out dancing every night, and if you give me a paragraph for the newspaper, I will give you five shillings."

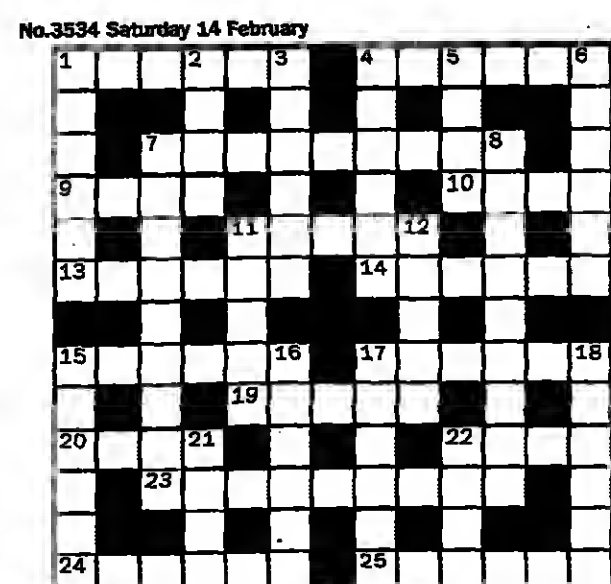
Eventually, Lord Beaverbrook sent for me. Of course, along with other men I had met, he fell in love with me straight away. Every day I had to go to the Hyde Park Hotel, where he had his office, and show him what I'd written. And he showed me how to write for a newspaper.

Before we arrived in London, my mother had said: "As you've got two younger brothers still at school, we must spend the holidays in the country. We went back to Worcestershire, where we had lived before, and rented a small house near Bredon. One day the elder of my brothers said: 'You must be very quiet, because I have to write an essay for school.' So I said, 'I will write a book.'"

The whole family said, "Ha, ha, you will never finish it." But I did. It went into masses of editions, and was such a success that I thought I'd go on writing books. This was quite unusual, because in those days, a lassie didn't soil her lily-white hands with work.

'St Valentine' and 'The Scent of Romance Original' are Dame Barbara's signature scents, containing a high proportion of natural flower essences. They are available by mail order from The Perfumers' Guild, price £16 each. Details: 01923-260502. Either will complement a reading of 'In Love in Luca' (£3.99 from Mandarin)

CONCISE CROSSWORD



- ACROSS**
- 1 Battled (6)
 - 4 Blows (6)
 - 7 Kitchen gadgets (3-6)
 - 9 Old Peruvian (4)
 - 10 Compass bearing (4)
 - 11 Sing repetitiously (5)
 - 13 Fortified wine (6)
 - 14 Elaborate (6)
 - 15 Of the stars (6)
 - 17 Seller (6)
 - 19 Power-assisted cycle (5)
 - 20 Line on graph (4)
 - 22 Those in favour (4)
 - 23 Gloomy (9)
 - 24 Guard (6)
 - 25 Meagre in quantity or quality (6)
- DOWN**
- 1 Greek goddesses of vengeance (6)
 - 2 Senile (4)
 - 3 Irritable (6)
 - 4 Japanese robe (6)
 - 5 Monster (4)
 - 6 Determine (6)
 - 7 Odd (9)
 - 8 Time of one's youth (5,4)
 - 11 Dairy product (5)
 - 12 Attempted (5)
 - 15 Counting frame (6)
 - 16 Delightful (6)
 - 17 Fine parchment (6)
 - 18 Prayer beads (6)
 - 21 Hit by bullet (4)
 - 22 Continent (4)

Solution to yesterday's Concise Crossword:
ACROSS: 1 Ood, 3 Wrangles (Quadrangles), 9 Infer, 10 Stierum, 11 Kit, 13 Manifesto, 14 Adroit, 16 Always, 18 Brilliant, 20 Egg, 22 Tropics, 23 Label, 25 Royalist, 26 Ugly. DOWN: 1 Quick, 2 Off, 4 Rising, 5 Needful, 6 Landscape, 7 Summons, 8 Fritz, 12 Territory, 14 Arbitrator, 15 Ill-will, 17 Kassus, 19 Tail, 21 Gully, 24 Bag.

BRIDGE: ALAN HIRON

North-South game; dealer West

North
♠ Q 9 3 2
♥ A 9 8 6 2
♦ Q
♣ A 9 5

West
♠ K J 6 5
♥ J 7
♦ 10 6 4 2
♣ J 2

East
♠ none
♥ Q 10 4
♦ A K J 5
♣ K 10 8 7 6 4

South
♠ A 10 8 7 4
♥ K 5 3
♦ 9 8 7 3
♣ 3

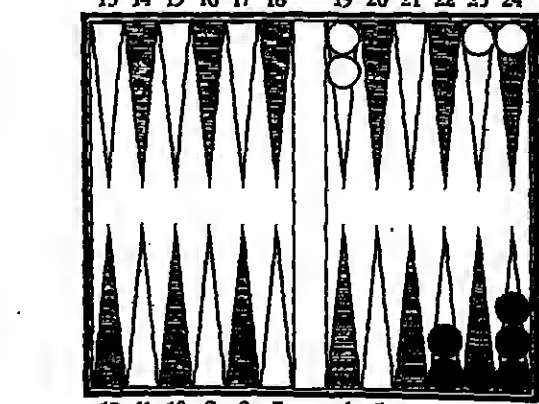
Over the past week or so I have described a number of good things that were done in the Macallan International Pairs, so I suppose that I ought to redress the balance by giving a bad one. Tactfully, I shall preserve the anonymity of the players.

After two passes, East opened One Club and South found a vulnerable overall of One Spade (1). West bid One No-trump and North made an unassuming cue-bid of Two Clubs (agreeing spades and showing the high-card values for a raise to at least the Two level). East bid Three Clubs and a relieved South was able to pass, as did West. North now launched into Four Diamonds – a splinter bid, showing diamond shortage – and East doubled. Again South was able to pass, but North was not finished yet (remember his initial pass) and he made another cue bid, Four Hearts. Now South was compelled to bid Four Spades and West's double (a dubious move) ended the auction.

West led ♠ Q against Four Spades doubled and, after winning with dummy's ace, I think that most, if not all, of my first-year students would have led ♦ Q, preparing for a cross-ruff. This seems to lead to an easy 10 tricks, for what else could West have for his bidding but a hand that included ♠ K J 6 5?

Declarer's actual play of ducking a heart all round at trick two baffled both the audience and the commentators, and when he later cashed ♠ A ... well, all I can say is that he managed the rest of the play well enough to escape for one down. But, with the Butler scoring method in force, this proved a very costly outing.

BACKGAMMON: CHRIS BRAY



Time to eat humble pie. The first problem in the Christmas Quiz should have been published with the diagram above. The correct solution to this problem is that Black should double and White should drop, as published last week. Unfortunately, in writing the quiz I accidentally moved the third man on Black's one-point to his three point. This small difference is enough to change the answer from a drop to a take. I am indebted to several of my colleagues from the Double Fives club for pointing out the error of my ways. As a result I am awarding an additional prize and this is on its way to Michael Crapper of London SW18.

The main difference that the error in the diagram makes is that in the position above Black no longer wastes a roll on sequences where he rolls a number containing a '2' on both of his first two rolls, except if one of those rolls is 21. This small change makes quite a difference in equity. In the position above White's equity if he takes is -2.17. With the third man on the three-point his equity rises to -1.44. Thus the position above is a narrow pass, the quiz problem as published a clear take.

The lesson for everyone here is that in bear-offs very small differences in the position can lead to very different cube actions and it is only by objective analysis that you can come close to the right answer. Over the board you will get some of them wrong but with practise and experience you will get better.

Hugh Sconyers, an American analyst, has produced a CD which gives exact bear-off equities for all bear-offs where both players have nine men or fewer and all men are within the home boards. This is an invaluable analysis tool and although \$99 is not cheap it is worth the investment if you want to study endgame bear-offs seriously. The CD is available from Carol Jay Cole, 3719, Greenbrook Lane, Filra, MI 48307-1400, USA.

MAKING



TRACKS

The route of eagles and egotists

Continuing his series on great short railway journeys, **Matthew Brace** takes the train from Fort William to Mallaig

They are a tough breed up in Fort William, withstanding over the years several invasions and skirmishes, to say nothing of the atrocious weather that lashes this part of the Scottish Highlands. The town's latest battle has been to save the *Deerstalker Express*, the Caledonian sleeper train from London.

As Charles Moore, owner of a local guest-house, explained: "It's our link with the south. If we want to go on holiday, Heathrow and Gatwick offer more than Glasgow or Edinburgh. We just jump on the sleeper and we're in Euston before we know it."

Thanks to the efforts of Mr Moore and friends the sleeper is still running, but they were not the first train campaigners to fight to retain services from Fort William. The track to Mallaig on the coast was under threat during Dr Beeching's time, but was saved then, too, by solid local support.

I and the elderly woman who boarded the 8.45am last week were grateful to them. We were the only two passengers on the train. She was going on from Mallaig on the two-hour ferry to the tiny island of Eigg, where she originally comes from and where her daughter still lives.

We were riding a historic route. A railway from the Scottish interior to the Atlantic coast was a dream for train buffs for decades, no more so than when the West Highland line reached Fort William in 1894. One reason was to carry the fish stocks from Mallaig to markets inland, but the egos of the rail-builders must also have played a major part.

Eventually a combination of public funds from Westminster coffers and the resources of private landowners meant that the line could be funded. However, another seven years of hard labour were needed, building viaducts, tunnels and cuttings through heavy rock and peaty soil, before the first train rolled into the dockside station at Mallaig.

You leave Fort William heading north east but the track soon swings round and runs west, with the bulk of Ben Nevis glaring down at you from behind the town. The line passes the ruins of Inverlochy Castle and crosses the River Lochy, where it empties into Loch Linne. At Banavie the train uses a 100-year-old swing-bridge across the Caledonian Canal, which is mysteriously drained at the moment. Looking right here you should be able to make out Neptune's Staircase, a series of eight locks leading to the higher sections of the canal.

After Corpach (or A'Chopaich in Gaelic, meaning "place of the bodies"), from where the bodies of dead Highland heroes were shipped to the holy island of Iona for burial, the train passes the Loch Eil Outward Bound centre, and then it is on to Glenfinnan.

These deserted glens are the haunt of golden eagles which soar high above the track searching for prey. Some are so powerful that they can carry off a small deer. They are hard to spot, but the station staff back at Fort William had assured me that they were out there somewhere.

The Glenfinnan Monument, topped with a statue of Bonnie Prince Charlie, was put up in 1815 on what is said to have been the spot where his standard was unfurled in 1745 as a rallying-point for the clans. You get a marvellous view of the monument and the small settlement of Glenfinnan from the 100ft-high viaduct that the train passes over before stopping at Glenfinnan station. If you are not going all the way to Mallaig, this is a good place to hop off and explore. A museum here offers a quick Scottish history lesson, which you can mull over as the train proceeds to Arisaig.

After Arisaig station the track swings north along the Atlantic coastline to the beautiful white beaches of Morar, from where the Inner Hebridean islands of Rhum, Muck and Eigg are visible. Rhum is the most distinctive, with its lofty mountains rising up out of the sea.

When you arrive in Mallaig you will doubtless be met by a chorus of giant seagulls. The station is in the heart of the small town and a short walk from the harbour, ferry terminal and the Fishermen's Mission. While taking in the beauty, spare a thought for the exhausted labourers who sweated to bring to life the dream of a Highland railway to the sea.

On the footplate

When to go: Four trains a day Monday to Saturday, one on Sunday (to 23 May). Between 22 May and 6 June, watch out for the Highland Festival, a wide variety of events across the Highlands and Islands centred on rail journeys such as Fort William-Mallaig (01463 719000). How much: adult standard return £11.50, children £5.75, adult day return £10.50, children £5.25.

Who to call: ScotRail 0345 484950, or (for disabled travellers) 01397 703791.



Two wheels good, four wheels better: quad bikes were originally designed for crossing farmland quickly – but driving them in mud, muddy circles is much more fun. Photographs: Penny Kendall

Mud in the blood

Nostalgie de la boue? Then look no further. Quad biking is the sport for glorying in mud. And minimal driving experience is required – you just roll up and roar off. Eric Kendall sits tight, revs up, and takes the fat-wheeled route to the open fields

A mud-plugging, high-speed contradiction in terms, the quad bike isn't a bike at all, but a four-wheeled, go-anywhere machine. With the seat and handlebars of a small motorbike, and four very fat little wheels shod with knobby tyres, its practical purpose is for crossing farmland quickly and with minimal impact. But who cares; its impractical purpose – for driving madly round muddy circuits – is much more fun.

Speeding over rough ground is what it's all about. There's lots of feedback through the handlebars, but not much control when the going gets slippery. When you know it's going wrong, all you can do is back off the power and sit tight. On firmer ground, it's just a great chance to drive the way you would like to on a road but can't because of other traffic, or dare not because you value your car too highly.

The great advantage of a quad hiking circuit is that, as on the M25, everything goes round the track in the same direction. Unlike the situation on the M25, you can reasonably come within a mud-splat of other riders, though touching the rear wheels of the bike ahead is a bad idea that sends you rearing skywards, and earns an official warning for dangerous play. Even without such antics, the bouncy nature of the ride can be hilarious for both rider and spectator, to whom larger quaddies look like jump jockeys hunched over the wrong kind of steed.

Though quad bikes have more wheels than a motorbike – to aid balance under trying conditions – the simplest ones have less in the way of complicated controls such as clutch and gears, so that anyone can just roll up and roar off. The throttle tends to be a simple matter of all or nothing, and sometimes you can even forget the brakes, which only make you slide when it's muddy. In the dry, it's a much faster game, and the cornering adhesion of four wide tyres makes rolling it as easy as falling off a quad bike.

You can do only so much whizzing around in circles without an objective, and quad bikes come into their own in competition – the kind of "to the death" duel that develops between firm friends as soon as they see a chequered flag or bear huzzing

engines and a phantom Murray Walker screaming hyperbole into their helmeted ears.

After a few warm-up laps, the start is a nervy, high-revving affair with no quarter given. The bikes squirt off the line sluggishly (no one could accuse them of being quick off the mark) in a wheel-spinning fight for the best path. Hogging the only navigable pair of ruts into the first hill is likely to establish an unassailable position, and will certainly shower the pursuing pack with wheel-spun mud – which is at least half the point of the exercise for rugby players who are missing their weekend game.

Only skulduggery from behind or an error under pressure by the front rider is likely to change the outcome. Overcooking a fast bend is a sure way to blow it: drifting inexorably out of the optimum curve and away from the area of maximum grip, you can suddenly find yourself going nowhere fast, wheels spinning, back end snaking and a stream

of riders hurtling by. Too much power into a tight bend is even worse, taking you right off the track, with the bike ploughing onwards regardless of where you steer. At this point, neither braking nor praying will help.

The finer points of the game come quickly to most people. Within a couple of laps you'll be bouncing on your seat for extra traction, sitting right back to get the weight over the driving wheels, and leaning out round corners to improve contact with the ground. You may only be in some

forest in Wales, but in your mind's eye you're ascending the podium, being garlanded and sprayed with champagne, having gloriously taken the World Quad Biking Championships, putting Britain right back where it belongs in motorsport – exactly the kind of lapse in concentration that can lead to the wrong line through a boggy dip, a squelchy grind to a halt, and the humiliation of "the man" coming to tow you out, long after the race has been won.

Quadding essentials

Most quad hiking outfits use simple machines: there's a throttle lever on the handlebars to make them go, brakes like those on a mountain bike, automatic transmission and a lever beside your right leg with which to select reverse if it all becomes too dull simply going around forwards. There are also more powerful, four-wheel-drive versions, which few members of the public have the self-control to handle safely round a track.

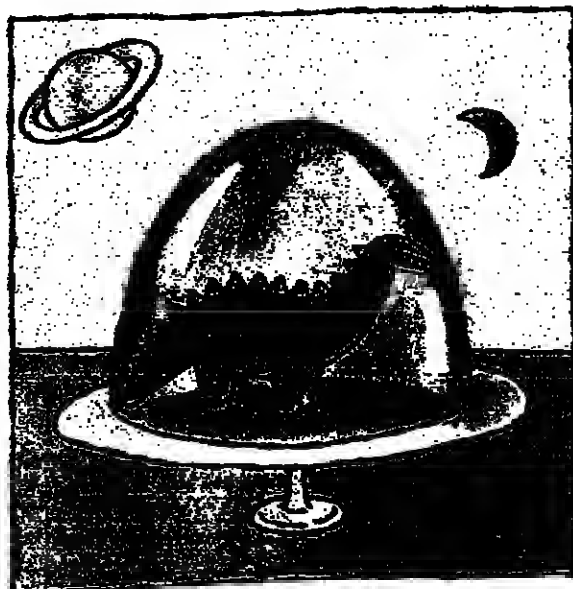
Quad bikes are the machines whose distant drone could ruin somebody's weekend, so circuits tend to be miles from the nearest habitation. Acorn Activities (01432 830083) runs a new, purpose-built course at a woodland site in Herefordshire and also has locations in Shropshire and Wales; they can provide a complete package, including quality accommodation near each of their sites. Rob Island Country Crafts & Leisure (01608 650413) operates in the Cotswolds, and KCS Sport (01832 273134) can organise quad biking countrywide.

Helmets should always be provided; check that overalls are also available, or wear very old clothes, particularly in muddy conditions. Boots (or old trainers) are essential.



WHAT, WHERE, WHEN ...

Ever wanted to query the Aristotelian universe, or ask Isaac Newton about his fluxions? If so, then the Kent Festival of Science is for you. After some idle chit-chat with visiting scientists Galileo, Newton and Einstein (all looking pretty good for their age, it must be said), you can engage in a multitude of interactive scientific displays and experiments.



For example, test your sporting potential with a Batak board, make a Jurassic jelly, and then relax by gazing at the stars in an inflatable planetarium.

Kent Festival of Science, Canterbury College, New Dover Road, Canterbury, Kent. 18-19 February. Admission charges: adults £5.50, children £4.50. For more information, call 01707 283008.



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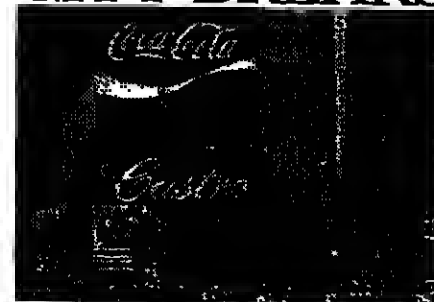
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Fabulous Butcher Boy

Like the central character in his latest film, Neil Jordan would rather not grow up. Nick Hasted asked him why

IT WAS the voice Neil Jordan recognised first. Insistently innocent, ultimately terrible, it was a voice he couldn't have invented, but it suited him like skin. It was the voice of the Butcher Boy, Frankie Brady, a voice heard first in the head of Irish writer Patrick McCabe. *The Butcher Boy* was his novel, and Jordan didn't want to direct it. But when he started to work on its screenplay, he found he had no choice. The voice wouldn't leave him. He'd grown up hearing it, after all. "It's the voice of rural Ireland," he says, "the surreal pleasure in the ordinary you used to find there. I grew up in Dublin, not the country. But I knew that child's voice so well."

Jordan is sitting in the Soho office where he began his *Butcher Boy*. He talks quietly but with an even rhythm, looking out of the window absently. He's been around a long time, but his magical, complicated visions haven't wavered. There are sickly-sweet sensations in *Night in Tunisia*, the 1976 collection of short stories which made his young name, which linger still, attitudes in his first, impressionistic novel, *The Past*, which surface in the sweep of *Michael Collins*. All his films are dreams, false memories. The sensuous fairytale landscape of *The Company of Wolves* seeps into the London of *The Crying Game*.

The Butcher Boy may be the first time the source of those dreams has been reached. It's set in the Ireland of the early 1960s. Its young boy, Frankie, talks to the Virgin Mary and to aliens, to fish in the river and to his best friend. It's an imaginative world so rich that, when his best friend abandons him, it bursts its banks, bloody drowning the "real" world around him as he seeks vengeance on his neighbours. It's the Ireland Neil Jordan grew up in.

"One of the reasons I wanted to do the movie was to reinvent that world," he says. "I remember that mental atmosphere so well, the mixture of innocence and savagery, the strange cruelties. At school and at church, you were told about realities that had nothing to do with the world around you. You were told that God spoke to you personally. When I was a child, I spent half my time in a world that was not real at all. I remember being told at school that when God wanted priests, you just heard his voice. He said, 'I'll choose you', and there was nothing you could do about it."



Neil Jordan: 'It's a story of repression of emotion, of cultural deprivation, of people who can't even say they love each other'

"I wandered around for two years with my hands on my ears in case I heard that voice saying, 'Neil'. It was like being connected to another world. These things are very real to a child. Ireland wasn't really penetrated by the outside world until the late Sixties. It was a place outside time in a way, a preserved world. It was a world of madness, actually."

It was a world of more than religion. Frankie's acquaintance with the Virgin Mary is no more real to him than the American horror comics he devours, or the science-fiction films he sees. Frankie makes no distinction. He's lost in a world of wonder. So was Jordan. "The church's imaginative realities could be transferred to Dracula, to *The Twilight Zone*," he remembers. "Stuff you saw on television."

"When the Virgin Mary appears in the film, I thought about using a theremin, so she'd sound like a spaceship landing. You tend to live in that world when you're a kid. It's hard to remember it exactly

now, and I don't want to go on about it. I don't want to caricature that time. I didn't want to in the film."

The character whom Frankie most resembles is the boy in Volker Schlöndorff's film of Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum*. But where that child stops growing, standing for the suppressed horror of the Nazi Germany he's born into, Irish Frankie seems to swell with the repressions of his town. It's as if he's the id of Ireland, freezing at the Sixties' start.

"It's a story of repression of emotion," Jordan agrees. "It's a story of cultural deprivation, it's a story of people who can't even say they love each other until they're dead. That's very true of the Ireland I know. But it's true of other countries, too. Look at the United States. No matter how many therapists you go to see, they don't teach you how to deal with your own feelings."

Frankie himself represses almost nothing, except the desire to grow up. He keeps his child's world of games and dreams pristine, until his inno-

cence ruins him. It's this personal suppression, this desperation, that Jordan identifies with most deeply of all. "He actually refused to believe that his world of childhood certainties would end," he says with animation. "I remember feeling that so clearly. We grew up near a big old Guinness estate that went to ruin, so when I was a kid I was in its trees every day, I'd be Robin Hood. I remember when kids' tastes began to change at 10 or 11, when they didn't want to play any more. I remember not wanting to do that. I just wanted to run around in my Robin Hood costume. And then you end up in the tree on your own, and you say 'Where have they all gone?'"

Was he like the boy Frankie in other ways? "The boy who plays him looks the spitting image of me when I was that age," he chuckles. "His face is so huge! But he's from rural Ireland, and kids grow up pretty fast there. I thought the language in the script was so bad he might be upset, but he said, 'No bother'. So he starts acting,

and the stuff coming out of him was so extraordinary I had to ask him to stop - 'Ya spermy little bastard!' It's down-home rural stuff. I wasn't like that. I grew up in the suburbs of Dublin. I read and I scribbled."

In the decades since, Jordan has never completely lost that attachment to boyhood. It's no wonder that, in all his dealings in the compromised, "adult" world of Hollywood, he seems hardly to have been touched. He still thinks of himself as a marginal character, just as he did when I first met him, before the release of *The Crying Game* gave

him his first Hollywood success. He's since made *Interview with the Vampire* and *Michael Collins*, major releases. Surely he's been tempted, along the way, to change his nature?

"I just want to make independent films," he says. "The *Butcher Boy* is a Warner Brothers movie, so the conversation is absurd. But whether it's a small movie set in Ireland or London or a big studio movie, I want to make it with the same spirit, the same freedoms."

The Butcher Boy is released on Friday 20 February.

A WEEK IN THE ARTS DAVID LISTER

SOME SCORN has been poured on poor old John Prescott because he decided, after his dousing at The Brits, to stay doggedly on so that he could watch Fleetwood Mac. Had he hung on wet and furious for Shola Ama or All Saints, the cynics say, he might have redeemed at least a little street cred for New Labour. But Fleetwood Mac?

As it happens, I'm with Prescott on this one. From where I sat at last Monday's show, Fleetwood Mac gave the best set not by a whisker but by a mile, and the London Arena can rarely have seen so many people of all ages up and boogie-ing as during that all too brief 15 minutes or so.

The state of middle-aged rock, even for those bands that do not possess the ever-ethereal Stevie Nicks, remains reasonably healthy as far as live performance goes. What is more puzzling, and a lot more interesting, is the state of middle-aged rock writing. The Stones' new album is actually rather good, but does not contain a true classic. Paul Simon's new musical is his worst album ever; Paul McCartney's latest signals a renaissance, but he also has not really delivered for years. Pete Townshend and Ray Davies, writers of English eccentricity, whose songs captured both the optimistic spirit and the neuroses of an era, seem to have given up.

It's a massive irony that live performance, which was supposed to limit the lifespan of rock 'n' rollers, still sees the big names playing big arenas. Yet composing, which makes no demands on waist or hairlines, finds them wanting. Roger Daltrey of The Who once told me that he was disappointed that all pop composers can deal with young love, but none had tackled the subject of middle-aged angst. He was particularly disappointed, he added, that The Who's composer, Pete Townshend, had not tackled the subject, a subject that would have appeared made for him. Townshend in turn told me that he and his

contemporaries had a youthful energy in the Sixties which was now gone.

It's true that most rock and pop composers seem rooted in their first subject matter, find it unsuitable and virtually throw in the towel. I've never really understood why. In no other musical form, from opera to jazz, are writers redundant in their middle years.

They are often on the verge of their greatest works. And even if they find the neuroses and occasional joys of middle age inappropriate, why can't the pop composers simply continue with the subject matter of their youth? There should be no reason why Paul McCartney couldn't write "Penny Lane" now. But somehow we don't expect him to, and he doesn't expect himself to either.



I think there is a sense among the writers that the medium is no longer appropriate for them, leading to a sense of insecurity. That struck me when I received a phone call recently from a polite chap saying he ran a band, it was about to go on a tour and could I give them a plug? Which little garage outfit was this, I wondered wearily? "We're called Fairport Convention," he said helpfully. The architects of British electric folk should be a lot more sure of themselves. So should all our middle-aged songwriters. As far as street cred goes, a great new song is worth more than a dozen jugs of water poured over a Cabinet minister.

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THE WEEK ON RADIO ROBERT HANKS

STANLEY Kubrick is supposed to have banned screenings of his film *A Clockwork Orange* in Britain after a copycat killing. As yet, however, recorded incidents of extreme violence inspired by radio drama are thin on the ground, and the picture is unlikely to be changed by last Saturday's adaptation of *A Clockwork Orange* on Radio 4. The problem for radio violence is partly one of emotional intensity - seeing blood being inevitably more disturbing than hearing about it. Even more importantly, though, it's a matter of sheer comprehensibility: thumps and gurgles, the suggestive chorus of faulty plumbing that stands in for most forms of assault short of a gunfight, are too unspecific to be much help to the listener.

Of course, comprehensibility can be overrated - some of the best radio plays are ones that are prepared to let go of clarity and nuance every so often, if it means boosting action and emotional realism. But in this case there were too many imponderables going on. John Hardy's electronic soundtrack, thumping and glooping away in the background, competed with dialogue spoken largely in Nadsat, the future slang Anthony Burgess invented for the book - a complex jargon which on radio reduces every conversation to a matter of squally muskrats in the upchuck and noddying the flobalobs.

The net result was that, to begin with at any rate, it was hard to make out anything much, except perhaps the splash of metaphorical batwater swiftly followed by the splat of a figurative baby. Adding oc-

casional translation only served to set the listener's zobbies, or teeth, on edge and oobivat, or kill, the pace and authenticity.

Later, as the ear adjusted, things improved, but only to leave you wondering if Burgess's original is all it's cracked up to be. Every imagined future is bound to pale besides reality when it eventually arrives, but some wear worse than others. It's symptomatic of Burgess's failure that he based Nadsat on Russian, apparently in the hope that it would not date. As things have turned out, it has dated extraordinarily badly - no one would now think that Russia could ever compete with the United States as a centre of teenage culture, and the very idea fixes *A Clockwork Orange* firmly in its Cold War context.

The same dualism blunts the novel's moral: in the person of Alex, the vicious teenage thug with the passion for Beethoven, Burgess projected a fairly clear-cut choice between moral freedom with all its attendant evils, and goodness achieved at the cost of individual will. He seems to have been unprepared for the cosy blandness that has overtaken civilisation - where *Heaven and Hell* is the title of a Radio 2 documentary about Joe Jackson, and where all the threat and beauty is soothed out of music by Brian Kay's leechlike tones. At least Kay in person is more tolerable than Petroc Trelawney, who last week spent Brian Kay's *Sunday Morning* speculating on what Brian might be up to on his holidays in New Zealand. Radio rarely inspires violence, but this came damn close.

TOMORROW IN THE SEVEN-SECTION

INDEPENDENT ON SUNDAY



Actress Emily Watson talks about the unusual men in her life

PLUS:

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Gifford's life too large for big screen

Greg Wood on the trainer poised to strengthen his link with today's big race

THERE may have been hints of several well-known Newmarket figures mixed up in the arrogant, despicable villain of the BBC's unimpressive series *Trainer*, but as yet only one British handler has seen himself portrayed in glorious, big-screen celluloid. It was Josh Gifford, and he was not much impressed by the final result.

The film was *Champions*, telling the story of the improbable Grand National victory of Gifford's Aldaniti, and it fell to Edward Woodward to portray the trainer. "I thought the film was very disappointing," Gifford said this week. "We saw a preview before the premiere and I thought it was fantastic, it really brought tears to my eyes, but the actual premiere was very disappointing. They'd done a lot of cutting, and I think they cut the proper parts out."

From Woodward's point of view, though, it must have been an impossible assignment. Method acting is one thing, but it would take more than a few early mornings on wintry Sussex downland to get under the skin of a racing character like Gifford. You would need to have lived the life and laid down the experience, from the moment when a 10-year-old boy left home in 1952 and set out to be a jockey.

"It was in the blood," he says, "my father rode over 100 point-to-point winners before I was born, and I never thought about doing anything else. One day, father came back from Huntingdon races with the trainer, Mr [Cliff] Beechener, and I was showing off to my pony. He came up to me and said, 'what do you want to be?' I said, 'a jockey', like anybody would at that age. He said 'when do you want to start?' I said 'next week', and he said 'fine'. I was bloody homesick for a long time. I'd ring home every Sunday, and they'd ask, 'are you happy?' and I'd say 'yes', when I wasn't. But I wasn't going to give in."

By the time Gifford left Beechener for a job in Newmarket at the age of 14, he had already served a three-year ap-

prenticeship with plenty of rides on the Flat, and a year later he rode a winner in the Queen's colours at York. Soon moving on to jumpers, he won the first of four National Hunt championships in the 1962-63 season, forming a partnership with Captain Ryan Price which was not just successful, but controversial too.

And never more so than in the early years of the Schweppes (now Tote) Gold Trophy. Price and Gifford provided the winner in four of the race's first five years. Rosyth won the inaugural running, in 1962, when 41 hurdlers careered around Liverpool's tight course with predictably disastrous results. Stan Mellor was seriously injured in a fall at the second, and the race moved the following year to Newbury, when Rosyth won again, apparently after showing unusual improvement. Price's licence was temporarily suspended, and Gifford was banned for six weeks.

"The old man was told before the race that we'd be warned off if we won, and he said, 'what am I supposed to do, not run and tell them we're guilty?'," he says. "I remember getting to Newbury that day and asking the gunner what I should say if they had us in, and he said, 'just tell them the truth, like we always do. No one will ever go wrong doing that, Joshua'."

Two years later, they were back in the winners' enclosure with Le Vermontois, and again the next year, with Hill House, whose 12-length victory prompted jeers from some punters. "Some of them didn't like it very much, but I didn't hear any of the booing," Gifford says. "He was very well trained, the Captain was an artist and he made a very good job of it, but he didn't do any cheating. He told everyone before the race that it would win, so I really can't see what he did wrong. I just don't think people realised what a genius he was."

The ban after Rosyth's second victory was in his thoughts again recently when Leighton Aspell, Gifford's young condi-



Gifford has a strong contender for today's Tote Gold Trophy in Mr Percy

Photograph: Robert Hallam

tional jockey, was suspended for a week after being arrested, but not charged, in connection with a doping investigation. "Thirty years ago it was an absolute joke, and I honestly think it's ever more of a joke now," he says. "I was big enough to get over it, I was the champion jockey, but when it happens to a young boy like this, what he's had to go through has been so unnecessary and simple-minded. They've gone about it like cowboys."

The Tote Gold Trophy still has a special place in Gifford's affections, not least since he became the first person to win

both as jockey and trainer when Deep Sensation won in 1990. "After the National, this is the next race which comes to mind," he says. "It was always a lucky race for us, and if it had really been going my way, I would have won the first six. This afternoon, his runner is Mr Percy, whose claims are obvious after two comfortable wins so far this season."

"To be absolutely honest, I don't believe he's as good as his form shows," Gifford says, "but I hope I'm going to be proved wrong. I'd be a little more confident as well if the race was at Cheltenham, but he couldn't be

in better form and he won't let the punters down."

Victory would be something of a relief for a yard which has had a quiet season so far, and may not be overburdened with runners at the Festival next month. Even so, Gifford is one of just five current trainers with more than 100 winners at Cheltenham to his name, even if it did famously take him 18 years with a licence to saddle one at the Festival meeting itself.

It is now almost 50 years since the 10-year-old with a pony and high ambitions set off to become a jockey, and still his only regret is that he did not

make more of his talent for cricket. (He did, however, bowl out Brian Lara in a charity match a few years ago, which is not bad considering that Gifford reckons himself more of a batsman.)

"Racing has been so good to me, I've loved every second of it," he says. "It's harder work now, it's a young man's sport and owners expect you to go out to dinner, to entertain and be entertained when at my age you want to go to bed at 10 o'clock. But I still enjoy the winners, and I'll carry on until I find out what my children want to do. And anyway, I can't afford to retire."

Percy can pass rehearsal for Cheltenham

By Richard Edmondson

IT WAS while he was being questioned on television about the fate of the "weighing-room three" that Ted Walsh came up with a strange allusion. He thought the case epitomised the sort of justice you could find in Britain, the sort that befell his countryman in Guildford and Birmingham.

It is perhaps fitting then that Walsh participates today in a great international love-in at Newbury on St Valentine's Day, a card which exhibits that the Brits can organise a meeting when all Irish parties are happy.

There are five Irish entries for the Tote Gold Trophy, and with the greatest respect to Walsh's Commanche Court, the best of those appears to be Graphic Equaliser. Arthur Moore's winner of the Ladbroke Hurdle has been put up 16lb by the Irish handicapper for his Leopardstown win, but carries just a mandatory 4lb penalty here—the difference between a brick and a toothpick in his saddlecloth.

Indeed, there are many judges willing to speculate that the six-year-old will go on from this afternoon to play a considerable role in the Champion Hurdle. Though he may be contesting only a handicap, this is not a rash thought. Gold Trophy winners do rather well when trekking west.

Twelve months ago, Make A Stand ran his opponents ragged in this race before making his rivals look scruffy at the Festival. The previous year, the Newbury winner, Squire Silk, managed fifth at Cheltenham, while Mysliv achieved a similar position in 1995. The most remarkable result, though, was four years ago, when Large Action, Oh So Risky and Flakey Dove, the first three from Newbury, filled the same places at Cheltenham, though it was the mare that led home the boys on the major occasion.

The rationale for this history is simple. Newbury's race has always been extraordinarily valuable (this year it is worth a minimum £100,000) and inevitably attracts some very good horses, many of them improving up a steep curve. As a searching blow-out before the Festival it could not be better timed.

Kerawi, the second favourite, is another who is being primed for the Champion. The gelding's win in the Christmas Hurdle does not look as good, however, now the three behind him that day were slain by Master Beveled at Sandown last Saturday.

A trawl through the form book suggests that neither he nor Graphic Equaliser has as good a chance as Mr Percy. The seven-year-old represents the man with the richest pedigree in the race, Josh Gifford, and he too has his sights trained on another target.

other target. "I'm not grumbling about his handicap mark and as he's won two nice races he might as well have a crack at this," Gifford said. "If he's lucky enough to win or be placed we might have a crack at the Champion Hurdle with him."

Mr Percy (next best 2.20) it is then, to follow Ask Tom (1.45) on to the day's roster of winners. The latter has been getting the better, albeit narrowly, of Viking Flagship in recent times and he is more likely to be the one improving for a numerically disappointing Game Spirit Chase.

McGregor The Third (1.15) is hardly a surprising selection for the opener, though an arresting element of the day is the first screening of Market Rasen since it formed part of the ITV7 in 1982. "Those that

haven't seen this delightful rural course will see what a splendid place it is," Charlie Moore, the clerk of the course and Market Rasen head of tourism, said yesterday. "I feel that part of Uttroter's rise out of the ashes is because they have had this higher profile. And I know perfectly well from my own involvement at Warwick last year that people think the place is going places just because it has been on television. There is that perception."

One reality, of course, was that Uttroter used to pay Channel 4 for the privilege of having their racecourse billboarded on national television. Charlie is a bit coy when it comes to divulging if he has done the same. "We have had to do a deal," he said. "We have had a bit of help."

An interesting aspect will be how many helicopters survive the spiral down to the track as, during the war, Market Rasen was requisitioned as an anti-aircraft headquarters. Another element to sharpen the mind will be how many beasts actually contest the finale, the Gold Card qualifier.

In a similar coterie at Warwick last month there were eight non-runners in a heat which allowed participation at Cheltenham for horses that had merely been declared to run, never mind take part. Thresh Vort is already a non-runner in Lincolnshire and it remains to be seen if today will approach anything like the case of the "Warwick Eight".

● Jamie Osborne, one of the three jockeys arrested in the doping and race-fixing investigation by police, is to break his silence on BBC television today. Osborne will be interviewed after the 1.15 race at Newbury.

Richard Edmondson

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GREG WOOD THE A-Z OF BETTING

V is for...

Vet's certificate: Piece of paper which proves to the stewards that a trainer actually has a good reason for scratching a horse on the morning of a race, other than that they overslept

and missed all the fancy early prices. This is good news for punters, who understandably prefer to know about any physical handicaps their selection may be harbouring before it runs rather than afterwards, when a dismal run will often be casually dismissed as the result of a...

Virus: Marvellous catch-all excuse which relies on the certain knowledge that very few punters care much for microbiology, other than that nagging worry about whether the bloke backing his lungs up in the corner of the betting shop merely has a 60-a-day fog habit, or something more contagious. No one can deny that the average stable, be it at the racecourse or a trainer's yard, is very much like the average nursery school, full of youngsters with immature immune systems and a fairly casual approach to basic hygiene. None the less, the Virus is invoked so frequently to explain a dis-

appointing performance that you could easily imagine befringers with trolleys patrolling the streets of Lambourn and Newmarket, lambing the locals to bring out their dead. There are, of course, many and various bugs doing the rounds of the equine population at any one time, any one of which will take enough of the edge off a horse to cause it to run below its best. In these days of frequent blood tests, though, which should show up an incubating illness via a high white-cell count, the Virus is an excuse which should be going out of fashion. It seems, however, that it is just too convenient for many trainers to let go.

Vernet, Helen: Something of a overlooked heroine in the history of the women's movement, Helen Vernet was Ladbroke's on-course rails rep for more than 30 years in the first half of the century, and remains one of the only women to have

made an impression in what to this day remains a deeply chauvinist business. Small and well-spoken, Vernet stood no chance of competing for attention with the bellowing male bookies on nearby pitches, but thanks to careful cultivation of her client base, she turned Ladbroke into the bookmaker of choice, first for a host of the upper-crust female racegoers of the time and then, by association, plenty of their equally well-heeled partners. She insisted on working almost until her death, in 1956, at the age of 79, and would surely be disappointed that no woman since has made an equivalent mark in bookmaking.

Value: Which means different things to different punters. There are still those, for instance, who insist that since an odds-on winner is better than a 10-1 loser, the best approach to betting is to maximise the number of winners you back, no matter how short the price.

A growing number of punters, however, owe take a long-term view, and appreciate that the strike-rate necessary to make a profit from hot favourites is impossibly high, whereas someone backing only at, say, odds of 5-1 or more simply needs to succeed in one race in six to break even. The arrival of newspaper features highlighting the best odds on offer has allowed punters to compare the odds in a matter of moments, although any prices picked out by the resident experts as worthy of a bet will vanish just as swiftly. Hunting for the best offer available and setting an absolute minimum - 3-1 is as good a line as any - below which you will never tread is no guarantee of ultimate success, but it will always show a better long-term return than an addiction to odds-on chances.

Valentine's: The day on which we celebrate love, both requited and otherwise. Also a

huge open ditch which is jumped twice in the Grand National, and has broken just as many hearts.

View, Taking As: Once common but now all but extinct practice, whereby a bookmaker would decide that he did not fancy a particular horse and set about "getting" it, that is, extending its odds to attract as much cash as possible in the expectation that it would be staying in his satchel. These days, the major bookies tend to fall into line faster than a well-drilled squadron of elite troops, although Ladbroke did do some good business - and also attracted valuable publicity - over their view that Carville Hill would out win the 1992 Gold Cup. More often than not, though, you will find that if a bookie takes a view, he does so only when the stable lad doing the horse in question has assured him on oath that the animal dropped dead a couple of hours ago.

Catterick

HYPERION
1.35 Elusive Star 2.10 Lord Hastie 2.40 Country Orchid 3.15 Minella Express 3.50 Corallette 4.20 Dr Bones 4.50 Dawn Mission

Setting: Good (Good to Firm in places).
Going: Good (Good to Firm in places).
Course: is NW of town on A630, Ashdown. Tattersall's St. Course 2200. CAR PARK: Reserved 22, rest free.
① LEADING TRAINERS: Mr M Percy 21-24 (22.5%), M Hammond 21-24 (22.5%), M Moore 21-24 (22.5%), J. Tattersall 21-24 (22.5%).
② LEADING JOCKEYS: A. Dobson 10-12 (27.5%), T. Reed 10-12 (27.5%).
③ FAVORITES: 22-25 (23.4%).
④ LEADING FIRST TIMES: Gambley (veteran), Forbes (21); Talbath (24), Minella Express (25).

1.35 LEVY BOARD MARES NOVICE HURDLE (CLASS E) £2,500 added 2m
1. 22-45 ELUSIVE STAR (9) (9) Mrs M Percy 6 11 7. L. Lee
2. 22-45 ELUSIVE STAR (9) (9) Mrs M Percy 6 11 7. L. Lee
3. 22-45 ELUSIVE STAR (9) (9) Mrs M Percy 6 11 7. L. Lee
4. 22-45 ELUSIVE STAR (9) (9) Mrs M Percy 6 11 7. L. Lee
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2.10 BRIDGE SELLING HURDLE (CLASS G) £2,500 added 2m
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3.15 RED OILION GRAND NATIONAL TRIAL (HANDICAP CHASE) (C) £10,000 3m 6f
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4.20 ASKE HANDICAP HURDLE (CLASS C) £2,500 added 2m
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3.50 IAN HUTCHINSON AMATEUR NOVICES H'CAP H'DLE (F) £2,500 3m 11 f 110yds
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4.50 BROUGH HANDICAP HURDLE (CLASS F) £2,500 added 2m 3f
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Stoned snowboarder meets weird alien ritual of multi-coloured humanoid insects



CHRIS MAUME

SPORT ON TV

IF THE Olympic movement needed bringing up to date, Canada's snowboarding stoner, Ross Rebagliati, was the man to do it as sport and youth culture collided in a five-ringed haze.

It turned out that performance-enhancement isn't the problem – and quite right, too. Cannabis can only be performance-wrecking, I'd have said. From what I've seen at Nagano this week (BBC and Eurosport), I'd rather walk through Bangkok airport with a sackful of high-grade skunk than go within staggering distance of a snowboard with even a single nanogram of dope in my bloodstream, let alone 17.8.

At the announcement of the positive test, even François Carrard, of the International Olympic Committee, was apologetic, saying, "Opinions were quite split as to whether to apply sanctions." The highlight was when Carol Anne Letheren, secre-

tary-general of the Canadian Olympic Association, faced a media corps that was obviously loving it. Hazel Irvine introduced the BBC's news item on Wednesday lunchtime, saying, "He claims he's the victim of passive marijuana smoking" in a tone of naked disbelief, and when Letheren spoke of "the significant amount of time he spends in an environment where he is exposed to marijuana users," the press conference cracked up, and a half-sheepish, half tongue-in-cheek smile spread across her face. I imagine half the reporters were laughing at what Rebagliati's excuse said about snowboarding, while the other half were simply thinking, "Yeah, right, and I'm Howard Marks."

The idea that certain sports might benefit from a slightly woozy head is somewhat implausible, (and ski jumping strikes me as a particu-

larly bad example for the authorities to cite). Not even curling would benefit from a pre-match toké, though I suspect it might enhance the sporting experience.

The BBC has suffered this week from the whims of the host broadcasters – for three nights in a row, four curling matches were taking place, with cameras at three of them – but not on the Brits. They also suffered from the fact that their studio pundit, Hammy McMillan, while clearly a nice bloke, is about as invigorating as an overdose of Rotipol. He might, of course, have been cowed into near-silence by the Beeb's virtual studio, a sort of ice dome perched amid the mountain tops. You half expected to see Richard Burton and Clint Eastwood peering over the parapet behind Ray Stubbs' shoulder.

Curling's first surprise is the fact that it is played in a nice comfy arena – I'd always pictured it being played by rustics in mufflers and mittens on a frozen lake somewhere north of Tundra City. The second surprise was the racket the curlers make, barking like seals – it was like watching the highly hectic ending of *Rashomon* on Channel 4 a couple of weeks ago.

If you're easily bored by curling – and I must confess to one or two light snoozes over the course of the week – with a simple technique it's easy to make it strangely interesting. I used to love watching *Come Dancing* with the sound turned down, and it's the only way that figure skating is remotely bearable (any correspondence on this subject will be binned, by the way). Watching the curling in like manner had a similar effect – it became a wholly novel experience, like watching a weird alien

ritual performed by multi-coloured humanoid insects. Progressing to the slow first movement of a Bartok string quartet on the headphones turned it into something even stranger – first, the skip's ferocious concentration, then one of the sport's most compelling characteristics, the contrast between the stately progress of the stone down the rink, like the Queen Mother drifting serenely towards the "house", and the sweeping of the frenzied worker-ants, ushering her along. Ross Rebagliati would know what I mean.

I strongly suspect, from their pitiful performance against Chile, that the England football team had been indulging in some heavy passive dope-smoking themselves. Watching the highlights (ITV) and then listening to Glenn Hoddle and Alan Shearer talking it up afterwards was

a perplexing experience of the "were they at the same game?" variety.

Dion Dublin could be excused, as he was still high from actually putting on an England shirt, and Michael Owen didn't try to hide his disappointment. The Hoddle and Shearer Show, however, reminded me of nothing less than that bunch of bright-eyed, media-coached, pager-driven PR-pods (*Invasion of the Mini-Thatchers*). New bloody Labour. And while we're on the subject – and though I can think of no sporting associations except for his affiliation to Burnley FC – I raise a glass (or should that be an ice bucket?) to Danbert Nobacon, my Man of the Week.

What has obviously not been grasped by John Prescott, who following his drenching looked like an especially grumpy Kenny Dalglish, is that that's all politicians are good for.

Much maligned mercenary who never fails to entertain

Adam Szreter on the tale of Sergei Bubka, who competes in Birmingham tomorrow

DESPITE the fact that the coffers of British athletics have been bled dry with the payment of exorbitant appearance fees by various promoters over the past 15 years, Sergei Bubka, one of the most bankable athletes during that time, will attend only his third meeting in this country tomorrow at the Bupa Indoor event in Birmingham.

In the process of breaking the world pole vault record a staggering 35 times, indoors or out since 1984, Bubka has attracted his share of adverse publicity. His method of moving the record up by a centimetre at a time, ensuring a prize every time, has led to him being labelled a mercenary, but in a sport where cynicism has become the prevailing currency, this might just be a trifle rich.

Bubka himself will not tire of pointing out that for him, it is the competition that counts. After all, he set the first 10 of his world records while he was still living in his native Ukraine and hardly received a penny; and unlike one or two high-profile athletes of his generation, Bubka can seldom be accused of not giving value for money.

The first time he competed in England, at Crystal Palace in July 1984, he set the third of his world records, and the last time, at the same venue in 1993, he provided us with what is still the only six-metre clearance seen in this country. Tomorrow at the National Indoor Arena he will almost certainly attempt to break his existing record of 6.15m, also set indoors in his native city of Donetsk five years ago.

Now 34, his record-breaking days are numbered but Bubka has stated his intention of getting through to the next Olympics. Despite winning every World Championship since the inaugural one in 1983 – a feat unlikely to be equalled – he may feel he has a score to

settle with the Olympics as a combination of boycotts, injury and, in 1992, a rare failure, has restricted him to one Olympic gold medal.

It was after the break-up of the old Soviet Union that Bubka moved to Berlin and then to Monaco, where he now lives. His friend Andrei Medvedev, the Ukrainian tennis player, is one of his neighbours. Bubka has spoken of a desire to become involved with sports administration when he eventually hangs up his pole, and with the headquarters of the International Amateur Athletic Federation now in Monaco he is handily placed.

It was in conjunction with the IAAF that Bubka offered his services in October at a seminar in Budapest, where his contribution to a discussion entitled Limits and Possibilities in Human Performance gave a fascinating insight into own development. "My interest in sport came from playing in the streets around my home with my brother and my friends," he said. "As a boy I loved to play all sports, especially street hockey and football. I would run like crazy because I just had to win. As long as I can remember, the spirit of sport was in my blood."

"By the age of 10 I had taken part in most sports and a friend of mine recommended me to a pole vault coach called Vitaly Petrov because he knew I was strong for my age. Petrov was to be the greatest influence on my life as an athlete."

"I was with him for 16 years and no one in the world knows more about pole vaulting technique. He showed me that the pole vault was really two sports: it was athletics on the runway, during the approach and take-off, and it was gymnastics once you were in the air and until you cleared the bar. Since 1990 I have had a gymnastics coach who helped me make great im-



Opening the bank vault: Sergei Bubka commences his run-up

Photograph: Shizuo Kambayashi/AP

provements in the second phase of the vault and I would say my ability in this phase is what helped me break world records."

Bubka has often been construed as aloof and unapproachable, but says this is just another aspect of his performance. "As an athlete I have had to learn to be reserved, to waste no energy that could be used in competition. I realised that I was sensitive by nature and that sometimes I let things affect me."

"I arrive at the stadium two hours before a competition because I want to look at every possible thing that could influence my result: how is the vault area, where are the stands located, what are the weather condi-

tions? I need to think about technique, about running, about my warm-up. Finding motivation is something you must work harder at as you get older and become more successful."

Tomorrow in Birmingham, Bubka, along with Heide Gerschlager and Maurice Greene, will be among the dying breed of athletes paid to appear in this country. There will be no Ferrari or Mercedes for a world record, as there has been before for Bubka, and whether he finds the necessary motivation remains to be seen. But if it is the last appearance in Britain by one of the greatest athletes of all time it would be a shame to miss it, whatever he does.

BUBKA'S WORLD RECORDS

OUTDOOR	INDOOR
5.85m.....Bratislava 25.5.84	5.81m.....Virkus, Lithuania 15.1.84
5.88m.....Paris 2.6.84	5.82m.....Mian 12.84
5.90m.....London 13.7.84	5.83m.....Inglewood, USA 10.2.84
5.94m.....Home 31.8.84	5.82m.....Osaka 15.1.86
6.00m.....Paris 13.7.85	5.87m.....Moscow 8.2.86
6.01m.....Moscow 8.7.86	5.94m.....Inglewood 21.2.86
6.03m.....Prague 23.6.87	5.85m.....New York 28.2.86
6.05m.....Bratislava 8.6.88	5.97m.....Osaka 15.1.87
6.06m.....Nice 10.7.88	5.97m.....Turk 17.3.87
6.07m.....Shizuoka, Japan 6.5.91	5.93m.....Osaka 11.2.89
6.08m.....Moscow 26.8.91	5.98m.....Donetsk 17.3.90
6.09m.....Formia, Italy 8.7.91	5.98m.....Volgograd 9.2.91
6.10m.....Malmö 5.8.91	6.10m.....San Sebastian 15.3.91
6.11m.....Dijon 13.6.92	6.11m.....Donetsk 19.3.91
6.12m.....Padua 30.8.92	6.12m.....Grenoble 23.3.91
6.13m.....Tokyo 19.9.92	6.13m.....Berlin 21.2.92
6.14m.....Sestriere, Italy 31.7.94	6.14m.....Levin, France 6.2.93
	6.15m.....Donetsk 21.2.93

Cayard strikes out as fleet close in on Cape Horn

Sailing

It was all going to plan for Paul Cayard and his crew on EF Language as they increased their lead on the fifth leg of the Whitbread Round the World Race, opening a gap of 56 miles on the second-placed Swedish Match.

The American skipper wants to build as big a lead as possible, because he believes the fleet will compress dramatically once they round Cape Horn, possibly later today.

"It is easier to be in control when you are at the front," Cayard said yesterday. "I believe the race will restart at the Horn. This is a very long and tricky race, hundreds of miles can be won and lost going up the coast of South America."

After 13 days at sea since leaving Auckland on the 6,670 mile, fifth leg to Brazil, the fleet are eager to escape the south-

ern ocean. However, they know that the winds off the coast of Argentina are as fierce as they are ferocious before the Horn.

"It also looks like the leaders will get some headwinds or at least lighter winds in the vicinity of the Horn," Roy Heiner, the skipper of sixth-placed Brunel Sunergy, said, "so the present stretching will stop, and compress the field again."

This is making a number of skippers reassess the way they approach the Horn. Grant Dalton has decided to take Merit Cup, currently fourth, further south. "We are heading where there's more breeze, otherwise we will be in big trouble."

WHITBREAD ROUND THE WORLD RACE (fifth leg, 4,670 miles, Auckland, NZ, to São Sebastião, Brazil): 1 EF Language (Swiss) P Cayard 2,881 miles to finish; 2 Swedish Match (Swiss) G Heiner 2,825 miles to finish; 3 Brunel Sunergy (UK) R Heiner +2,822; 4 Merit Cup (Monaco) G Dalton +2,811; 5 Innovation Kvaerner (Nor) K Frostad +2,807; 6 Brunel Sunergy (Nor) R Heiner +2,802; 7 Chronicle Racing (US) D Smith +2,801; 8 Oze (US) L Smith +2,804; 9 EF Education (Swiss) G Gullotti +2,805

Catapulting through the ocean as we play chicken with the wind

IT HAS been like a Disneyland ride, with speeds unbelievable for a monohull as Merit Cup was catapulted down the southern ocean waves – going half sideways, half straight.

The trimmers and helmsmen have shown tremendous skill keeping us on course on this fifth leg of the Whitbread – and safe. Twice we were doing 31 knots, with the gusts coming and going.

The aim is to keep the spinnaker on through the puffs. On Thursday night they were getting up to about 42 knots and then dropping back to 32. We were playing a game of chicken with the wind, with a medium-sized spinnaker up all the time. I don't think we could have got it down even if we had wanted to.

The helmsman has to anticipate the gusts and get the bow down and feel the lift of the wave, which you can't see in the blackness. As skipper, I don't like to think of the damage we would have done had we breached at those speeds.

Compared with the run through the night, yesterday felt like we are

dead in the water yet we had a westerly of about 20 knots and we were doing 13-14 knots.

There's no future staying in the north, so we've decided to head south where there's more breeze, otherwise we will be in big trouble. We hope that it won't be too expensive in terms of miles lost. The next two position reports won't be very kind to us. Toshiba will probably get away, but we should hold on to Innovation Kvaerner.

The more moderate conditions, the crew tidied up, but everything is still very wet. The sun is out, but there's not enough heat in it to dry anything. We cleaned up all the food that had been spilled on the floorboards, and all the other gear and clothing has been stowed.

It was stark contrast to earlier in the week when we had to contend with freezing water, violent winds, a spinnaker pole snapped in two places, the top three battens in the mainsail broken, and half the crew with colds. And it's supposed to be summer down here.



GRANT DALTON

It was impossible to settle the boat down. No sooner was a heavy spinnaker up than we would be flattened by a mighty gust and so the struggle would start to get the sail on board with frozen fingers and faces blasted by icy water.

You drag the sail down below, probably shipping a couple of tons of water downstairs as you open the hatch and repack the sail waiting for the squall to pass. The whole process takes about 45 minutes – it's very physical and it goes on day and night.

In addition, so much water seems to be getting below that we have had to pump out the lee bilge at least

every hour – sometimes more frequently.

We haven't seen any ice yet but, like I say, it has been very cold. On deck the air temperature is only one or two degrees C and there has been driving rain. The bow is under water at times with two feet of solid water washing down the deck at 20 miles an hour. It is impossible to stand up, so everyone is secured with harness and lifeline. We cannot risk anyone being washed overboard.

Motocross bike masks protect the face from the force of the cold spray – so there is no need to duck when you see it coming, even if it is still instinctive to do so, but you can still feel the cold. Everything gets wet and everyone is soaked to the skin.

However, when you are confident of averaging 380 miles a day in this sort of weather, you have to be very happy with the boat's performance.

A lot of people thought we wouldn't be able to hack it downwind in a blow following the pitiful performance on the second leg from Cape Town to Fremantle. I even had a few doubts.

But the fact was we didn't really get a shot at the big winds on that leg. What we did recognise was possible weaknesses in that area and we made adjustments to rectify them.

But there is the exhilarating side. At times we are flying through the air with more than a third of the yacht right out of the water.

Contrary to what people think, there's no fine line between maximum speed and safety. It is a fine line we cross only at the risk of putting the boat and crew in great danger.

Sailing at this speed in these conditions is dangerous. It is not safe at all. We calculate the risks and do all we can to minimise them, but there is always the possibility of catastrophic gear failure.

However, the Whitbread is a race, not a cruise. We all knew what we were in for. If we wanted to go cruising we would do that in the Mediterranean, or Caribbean, not in the southern ocean.

We're looking forward to getting round Cape Horn. We want to get out of this place and on to Brazil.

Resurgent Tigers mark out new territory in the Super League jungle

THERE were times last season when Dean Sampson wondered whether there would still be a Castleford for him to celebrate his testimonial with this year. Like everyone else, the Great Britain prop and the rugby league club's longest-serving player had his doubts.

"There was this feeling that Super League didn't really want us and there was a stage where everyone was rubbing their hands together and thinking that we were going to save them the job of kicking us out," he says.

"When Stuart Raper arrived as coach he drew on that. All through that campaign in the second half of the season he was telling us that no one was going to help us but us."

Cas escaped relegation and now they are not merely strengthening themselves on the pitch, but reinventing themselves as the sort of rugby club without which Super League

would be unthinkable. There has been an undercurrent of thinking – not – that Super League is about clubs in large centres of population. Castleford is a small town and not a notably prosperous one – "It's taken so many knocks that sometimes there has only seemed to be the rugby team left," says Sampson – and is hemmed in by other equally parochial league towns.

A hopeless case? Not according to the club's marketing and media manager, Michael McDonald – like Raper, an Australian from the Cronulla club in Sydney – who is taking the lead in transforming the Tigers' image.

"This has been known as a very traditional club and not particularly forward-thinking," he says. "The challenge we face is to move it forward on and off the field and we have decided to meet that challenge head-on."

Not everything he and the club

Castleford were facing extinction, now they are looking for expansion. Dave Hadfield reports

have in mind will be guaranteed immediate popularity. The proposed move out of town to a new stadium will not please those who stroll across the street to enjoy the atmosphere at Wheldon Road.

"We will listen to everybody's opinions, but the fact is that when people go for entertainment these days, they want to do it in comfort," McDonald says.

Equally heretical is the idea that Castleford should break out of their traditional heartland and attract spectators from rival territory, like Wakefield and Featherstone, as well as the broad acres beyond.

"Super League provides the best players and the best competition. There are a lot of people out there

who just need a bit of prompting to come and see the quality of players involved in Super League. They can watch us as well as watching their local club," McDonald says. "We don't want to lose the passion that people in Castleford have for their club, we just want to spread it wider."

McDonald has a template for his vision of a club that transcends its locality and becomes bigger than its home town. He has studied the success of the Green Bay Packers in American football and has spoken to them about some of the techniques they have used to spread their appeal outside their obvious catchment area.

Much of this echoes what has already been achieved at Bradford, but however often the Bulls and the Pack-

ers invoke marketing as the key to their success, they need to do the business on the pitch to make it work.

That is the task for Raper – who admits he would now be back on the beach in Cronulla if Cas had gone down – and his players. Sampson, a cornerstone of a decade's worth of Castleford sides of varying quality, believes that they have got what it takes.

The club's squad has been growing – in both senses. "We've got a squad of around 25 players who could go into the first team now, which hasn't been the case in the past," he says. "And where I always used to be the biggest in the pack, now I'm one of the smallest."

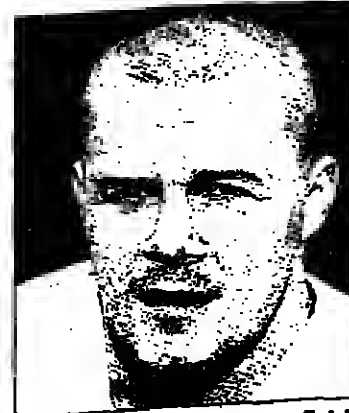
"It's going to be harder for us this year, because people will be expecting more of us. But I honestly think that we can make the top four. We're not up there with Wigan and Bradford, because we haven't got

their personnel, but we can be in the next group with St Helens, London and Leeds."

The Challenge Cup tie with Leeds today is an early test of Castleford's new sense of purpose and optimism. "So far it's a lot of words," says Raper. "It's heading in the right direction off the field, but we have to turn it all into results on the paddock."

Failure to do so at Headingley will create a yawning anticlimactic, seven-week gap until the start of Super League. It's a reminder that the Chinese do not regard the Year of the Tiger as propitious.

"It's been a big build-up and it could all come crashing down," Sampson says. His 10 years at Castleford have made him a realist. He also discovered the other week that the operation is not yet unrecognisably slick.



Sampson: Backing top-four finish

Arriving to pick up the proceeds from his pre-season testimonial match against Sheffield, he was expecting a cheque. "But they hadn't been to the bank, so they gave it me in big bags of coins."

It is a good metaphor for Castleford's situation as they try to convert a wealth of tradition into a new currency.

Bath still in running for Premiership title insists Robinson

Rugby Union

By Chris Hewett

ANDY ROBINSON, the Bath coach, insists his European champions can still steal the Allied Dunbar Premiership title from under the noses of Newcastle and Saracens, even though the two favourites have an eight-point cushion on which to rest their expensively recruited backsides. However, a Bath victory over Wasps at the Recreation Ground this afternoon will do more than lend weight to Robbo's optimism. It will also expose one of his more controversial arguments as so much stuff and nonsense.

Robinson remains a passionate supporter of the Heineken Cup, despite the boycott unanimously declared by the 12 top-flight Premiership teams. He does not, however, subscribe to the theory that European pool matches should be played in midweek – a measure that would solve the English club's ruinous heel-over-fixture scheduling at a stroke. "Rugby doesn't lend itself to three games a week," he says. "It can't be done."

Others believe it can, however, and they will point to Bath's current hot streak as primary evidence. The West Countrymen had several key players on international duty in France, Ireland and Wales last weekend, but that did not stop them sticking 47 points on Gloucester at the Rec on Wednesday night. Another vintage effort against Lawrence Dallaglio's half-baked Wasps outfit today will prove that with sensible selection and intelligent use of substitutes, the best sides can indeed survive the occasional three-day working week.

Richard Webster, an influential figure in the defeat of the Cherry and Whites, misses this afternoon's game after undergoing knee surgery and is replaced by Eric Peters, who scored three tries in an 11-minute cameo against Gloucester. "I won't give up on the title until it's mathematically impossible for us to win it," said Robinson. "We've got a run of home matches now. Our season has only just started."

Saracens, second to Newcastle on points difference, expect a hanker victory at struggling Bristol while the Gloucesters should see off Harlequins at Kingston Park tomorrow, especially as a hamstring injury has deprived the Londoners of Thierry Lacroix's cultured services at stand-off.

It may well be that another foreign import, Garry Pagel, will deprive Gloucester's Phil Vickery of a possible England debut against Wales next weekend. Northampton's mountainous Springbok prop had the youngster on toast at Franklin's Gardens three weeks ago and although Vickery has shown an unusual capacity to learn new tricks on the run, he cannot expect much change out of Pagel at Kingsholm this afternoon.

"Phil is one-nil down to



Victor Ubogu has forsaken London's night life for a return to the big time at the age of 33

Photograph: Arnold Slater

Why England need Ubogu

Chris Hewett says that problems in Clive Woodward's pack could be exposed by the Welsh for the first time in 10 years

A FEW minutes into the second half of England's opening World Cup pool match against New Zealand in 1991, the rival front rows pounded into each other for another set scrum. Graeme Bachop, the All Black scrum-half, placed the ball directly under the feet of Brian Moore, the English hooker, and snarled: "You can have that one if you want it. Moore... but you can't move a bloody muscle, can you?" Indeed, he could not. The ball sat there like a poached egg until the black pack sauntered forwards and reclaimed possession, their exercise in psychological one-upmanship satisfyingly complete.

Now, it is almost acceptable for an English scrum to struggle against three coalface legends of the stature of Steve McDowell, Sean Fitzpatrick and Richard Loe, especially if the experience proves as salutary as it did seven years ago. Similarly, it is not quite the end of the world if two red rose props are shunted from pillar to post by Christian Calmano and Franck Tournaire, as were Jason Leonard and Darren Garforth in Paris last weekend. Those Frenchies are a bit special, after all.

But what about next weekend, when an English unit unable to wrestle its way out of a wet paper bag locks antlers with the Welsh, who tend to feel about as comfortable at the set-piece as a Bedouin in a bob-

ble? Clive Woodward, the England coach, played his rugby by a pretty-boy centre rather than a knotted chunk of front-row gristle, but he knows full well that if his pack goes into reverse gear again on Saturday, his credibility will be dangerously weakened.

The Dragons have not enjoyed front-row parity with their nearest and dearest from the opposite bank of the Severn since they last won at Twickenham 10 years ago, but their current hall-playing trio of Andrew Lewis, Barry Williams and David Young quickly fancy their chances this time round. "We've got no hang-ups about Twickenham," said Young this week. "We have the chance to put a smile on the face of Wales."

Like all good props, Young considers the scrum to be the central dynamic in the psychological and tactical profile of an international match and while generations of heavily cauliflowered uglies have talked up the importance of their peculiar form of Saturday afternoon activity for the best part of a century, recent rule changes have made them more influential than ever before.

"The game has changed out of all recognition," said Young, the sole survivor of that 11-3 win in 1988 and a Lion for the sec-

ond time last summer. "Modern kicking tactics are based around keeping the ball in play, so the balance has shifted away from the line-out and back towards the set-piece. More importantly still, back rows now have to stay bound until the ball is clear. That makes the scrum a prime attacking weapon."

"I'm not sure how good or bad the English front row is at the moment; certainly, I don't think it's a great idea to judge them on the evidence of Paris because the French had an awesome unit who happened to be on edge. But it was interesting that the English tight forwards struggled for Lions Test places in South Africa. They're all good players, of course, but it became clear over there that the rest of us had built them up and put them on a pedestal. We won't make that mistake again."

So how can Woodward best shore up his crumbling barricades and save himself the agony of watching Rob Howley, Arwel Thomas and Allan Bateman running quality first-phase possession to their heart's content? Simple. He should back his instincts, the first and foremost of which is to pick the players on form. And who is the form prop in England at the moment? Victor Ubogu of Bath, that's who.

"Big Dada" is back on his game with a vengeance at 33. Having belatedly realised that London's hectic night life can swing along without him for a year or two, he has moved back to the West Country, worked hard on his notoriously unreliable fitness levels and is performing with a devil-may-care swagger that marks him out as a force of rugby nature. His match-winning tries against Cardiff and Pau guided Bath to the Heineken Cup final and he was comfortably the most effective forward in a knife-edge confrontation with Brive a fortnight ago.

Woodward's reluctance to embrace the obvious is curious, to say the least; if, as seems likely, he is working on the logic that Ubogu's legs will not last until next year's World Cup, Jason Leonard's continued presence in the side is contradictory in the extreme. Ubogu is playing sharper, more rounded and more athletic rugby than any prop in England at present. That should be more than enough for a coach in urgent need of a "w" in the credit column.

It is not Woodward's fault that Kevin Yates, his outstanding loose-head prospect, has hit off more than he can chew on the disciplinary front. "Poor

old Kev," sighed Andy Robinson, the Bath coach, this week. "He'd be in the team now, no question. It's tailor-made for him. He's the best No 1 in the country by a distance." All the more reason for the England selectors to back their form horse on the other side of the front row.

They will also do themselves a favour if they resist the temptation to recall Richard Cockerill and stick with Mark Regan at hooker. Cockerill has cultivated quite an image for himself this season – an ersatz Brian Moore with added attitude, he had the brass neck to frazzle the super-cool All Blacks at Old Trafford by trespassing on their haka – but Regan is a heavier scrummager and a more physical presence at ruck and maul. Given England's current anxieties, they should grab every ounce of muscle they can lay their hands on.

Whatever combination Woodward comes up with this weekend, he must not on any account throw an exceptional talent like Phil Vickery to the wolves. The Gloucester tight-head may well be England's cornerstone come 1999 but as Ubogu demonstrated in the most graphic terms when the two of them met at the Recreation Ground on Wednesday night, old dogs are eminently capable of giving young pups the occasional hurry-up.

Leeds ready to rely on Fleary

By Dave Hadfield

THE game's oldest competition begins in earnest this weekend, with the Silk Cut Challenge Cup providing a chance to put playing rather than posturing at centre stage.

After a discontented winter, there is an appetite for more wholesome fare. Holding the Cup as a pre-season event will always stick in the traditionalist craw, but at least it gets a prime showcase. That is more true than ever this year, with terrestrial television showing two live ties in each round. The first, at Headingley this afternoon, was an obvious choice. Meetings between Leeds and Castleford are always passionate.

The Leeds coach, Graham Murray, has sprung one surprise by naming the converted second-rower, Darren Fleary, in the front row, with the Great Britain prop, Barrie McDermott, fit again but on the bench.

Fleary is one of a clutch of Keighley players who moved across to Leeds last season. Most have now returned, but Fleary has impressed sufficiently to be kept on. According to the man he is keeping out, he is well up to the job.

Marc Glanville makes his competitive debut in a Leeds side captained for the first time by Jesty Harris, but Daryl

Powell is ruled out. Castleford, who drew at Headingley in a new year friendly, have their own new faces. Barrie-Jon Mather and Gael Tallec start, with Francis Maloney and Mike Smith among the subs.

The other Super League clubs meeting head-to-head also have a recent draw to their credit, suggesting Huddersfield's visit to Halifax could be an equally close affair.

Halifax, still in the familiar setting of Thrum Hall, have their three new Australians – Damien Gibson, Des Clark and Gavin Clinch – in their line-up, along with the veteran Kiwi, Gary Mercer, while Danny Arnold, a Wembley winner with St Helens last year, plays for Huddersfield.

It is Saints' progress the cameras will be tracking as they take on Featherstone. Their coach, Shaun McRae, admits to thinking long and hard about his scrum-half selection before giving the job to Bobbie Goulding ahead of Shaun Long.

Newcomers Paul Acheson, Chris Smith, Brett Goldspink and Paul Sculthorpe all play. At Wakefield, in a tie arranged for 4 pm to avoid a clash with Featherstone's 1.45, Jason Roach, Mike Eager, Adam Doyle, Danny Farrar, Danny Nuteley and Brendon Tutu all make debuts for Warrington.

Ten facts about the Challenge Cup

- Four amateur teams will be taking part in this weekend's last 32 for the first time for 50 years. It is more than 90 years since two amateur sides made the last 16.
- Third-round wins by Featherstone Lions and Ellenborough took the number of victories by non-League clubs over senior opposition since 1904 – the cut-off point for statisticians – to 14.
- The 1998 Challenge Cup winners will collect a record £100,000 from sponsors Silk Cut out of a total prize fund of £486,000. Losers this weekend will each pick up a £5,000 cheque.
- Sheffield Eagles have the current longest run of 10 successive appearances in the last 16. They have not been beaten at this stage since suffering an 8-6 home defeat to Keighley in 1987.
- Lancashire Lynx, founded in 1989, have never appeared in the last 16.

- Swinton have gone the longest without reaching the last 16. They last achieved it in 1983 with a 21-13 victory over Doncaster.
- Huddersfield hold the record Challenge Cup score with a 119-2 win over the amateur side, Swinton Park, in 1914.
- Wigan, 6-4 favourites this year, set a competition record when they went 43 successive matches unbeaten from 1988-96. Shaun Edwards, now with Bradford, was the only man to appear in all 43 ties.
- Of the clubs in action this weekend, only Batley, London, Rochdale, Sheffield, Swinton and Whitehaven – in addition to Lancashire Lynx – have never appeared at Wembley.
- The semi-finals will be held on successive days this year instead of on separate weekends but, up to 1962, they were always played on the same Saturday.

Points not cups come first for Welton captain Green

Hockey

By Bill Colwill

FIONA GREEN, the captain of Welton, the only non-National League club remaining in the fifth round of the EHA Cup, described tomorrow's visit of holders Hightown as a crucial game, but insisted that Welton's first priority will be today's league fixture against Sheffield.

"The Sheffield game is a big six pointer," Green said. "We are equal on points, just one place off the bottom and the league is our priority."

The captain sees the Cup game against Hightown as being like "Man United v Stevenage and if we score first, who knows? We have been focusing on ourselves and it will not be all out defence."

Welton will be pinning their hopes for that early goal on the Hull University student Pip

Hirst, who has been scoring regularly this season, in spite of Welton's lowly position. Even so the odds are that Beryl Hockey, their Canadian goalkeeper, will be in for a busy afternoon.

Club preparations for the weekend's double headers will not have been helped by the England's World Cup training camp at Lillleshall this week.

However, it seems unlikely that Clifton (league) or Leicester (cup) will do too much to dent Slough's ambitions of being the first club to take the indoor and outdoor leagues and the cup titles in the same season.

The highlight of the men's National League programme will be the visit of leaders Cannock to Reading. No doubt their respective coaches, Malcolm Wood and Jon Copp, have kept their plans under wraps, despite being roommates at an England training camp at Bisham Abbey.

Cotton hopeful about feedback from clubs on his vision for the future

By Andrew Baldock

Copies of Fran Cotton's controversial "Club England" blueprint are being sent to all Allied Dunbar Premiership and Jewson League clubs.

Cotton, the Rugby Football Union vice-chairman, has sent it to coaches and club chairmen

before a Twickenham meeting with them on 22 February.

The proposals would see top players contracted first to their country, despite the clubs having largely funded rugby union's professional era and despite the RFU having failed in court to evade the Restrictive Trade Practices Act.

English First Division Rugby Limited, the leading 12 clubs' umbrella organisation, has attacked Cotton's plans, criticising them as "totally unjustifiable", and "undermining" their efforts in the professional age.

"It is vital that I receive feedback from the clubs, who will

provide the vast majority of England representative sides," Cotton said. "The consultation will form an invaluable sounding board for my plans, and reflects a similar process undertaken by Cliff Brittle [the RFU management board chairman] for his personal vision, Rugby Restructure 2000."

"Without it, the proposals could potentially be undermined," Cotton continued. "Once I have as much feedback as possible, then I will ask the RFU management board and Council to support the document so that it becomes RFU policy at the earliest opportunity."



Slice of silver: Italy's Thomas Prugger leans into the slope as he carves his way to second place in the men's snowboarding giant slalom behind the gold-medal winner, Ross Rebagliati of Canada

Photograph: Petr Joseli/Reuters

Five-ring circus of thrills at Winter Olympics



Blade runner: The American K.C. Boutiette hits full power in the 1500m speed skating event

Photograph: Reuters



Cycle sleds: Snowstorms on the Olympic slopes also affected commuters at the nearby bicycle park

Photograph: AP



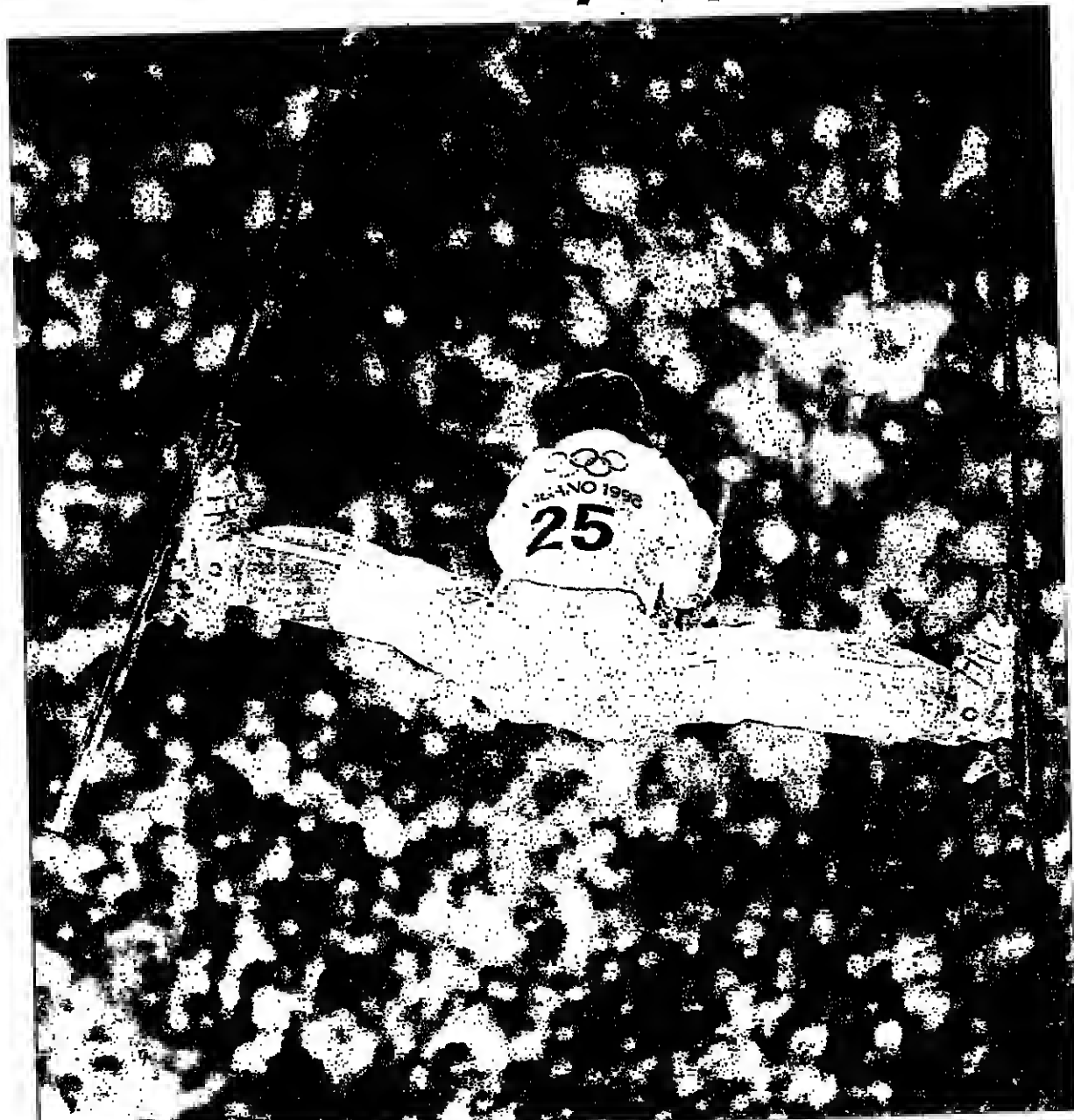
Ice wall: Netminder Vitaly Yermeyev blocks a shot from Slovakia during Kazakhstan's shock 4-3 win

Photograph: AP



Reggae Boys: The Jamaican bobsleighters Devon Desmond Harris and Michael Morgan in action

Photograph: EPA



Wide angle: Japan's Gota Miura delights a crowd of home spectators as he goes airborne during qualification for the men's moguls in the freestyle skiing at the Winter Olympics in Nagano

Photograph: Emmanuel Dunand/AP



Broken dreams: Erben Wennemars, of the Netherlands (top), suffers a fractured left arm in a collision with Grunde Njos, of Norway, who slipped during their men's 500 metres speed skating race

Photograph: Blake Sell/Reuters



Military might: Japanese soldiers clear snow from the men's slalom course

Photograph: Eric Gaillard/Reuters



Clean sweep: The rink is cleared of flowers and a blow-up doll decorated with a Tonya Harding mask

Photograph: AP



Headgear: A spectator sports Kermit the Frog as he waits for the luge event to get under way

Photograph: AP

'Help,' the sign read. 'We are being kidnapped by our driver!'



MIKE ROWBOTTOM

ON THE JOYS OF JAPANESE PROTOCOL

All my life, people have told me to stop bawling my shoulders and stand up straight. Finally, I have discovered a country where my natural stoop is advantageous - in that it can be mistaken for a bow.

I am still woefully ignorant about the nuances of nodding one's head in Japan, but I know this - the people here do it at you all the time, and if you do it back you are responding appropriately. You can tell that, because they nod at you again.

Before being deposited on these shores, we members of the Fourth Estate were reminded of the importance of protocol in Japanese society.

Business cards, for instance, are essential props in the social game. Conversations proceed in set patterns, moving through

generally recognised stages.

And, not surprisingly, the rules regarding the treatment of Royal personages are formalised to the point of ritual.

Thus, when Princess Anne decided to travel 70 kilometres out of Nagano town centre to watch the British men's curling team on Tuesday night, there were numerous blazered officials and dark-suited security men awaiting her as she stepped off the bullet train at Karuizawa.

Two men in suits, talking into their handsets, moved ahead of the party towards a shiny black limousine waiting in the station forecourt, and opened the rear door with something of a flourish before realising that something was going terribly wrong.

The Princess, wearing sen-

sible brown snowboots and a British Olympic padded jacket, had turned left, rather than right, and was heading in determined fashion for the team minibus.

The expression on the men's faces mingled deep incomprehension with rising alarm.

For a moment they stood frozen. Then they sprinted to catch up with the Royal party, whereupon an interpreter made a dismissive gesture towards their suddenly redundant limo. There was nothing else for it - they had to cram into the minibus as well.

Losing face is a serious business in this country.

Somewhere on the Olympic media transportation circuit there is a driver who will always look back upon these Games,

and in particular his journey to Wednesday's ski jump competition, with a shudder of horror.

His - our - everybody's problems began about a mile and a half from the event site, when the single lane traffic became completely jammed.

After 20 minutes or so, with the start time fast approaching, the mood on the coach began to change. From being merely hot - through a combination of brilliant sunshine and a not-so-brilliant ventilation system - the occupants of the bus became hot and bothered.

Noticing that the snowy path beside the road was beginning to fill with pedestrians, a group of us moved to the front and asked the driver to open the door.

He did not answer, or even

acknowledge our request. Instead, face set under the peak of his cap, he stared furiously out of his windshield.

The request was repeated. The request was repeated. The request was repeated. As the clamour of voices rose, the pressure to act in some way or other clearly became intolerable for the man at the wheel. He slammed open his side window, slammed it shut again - and resumed his furious staring.

By now a large French photographer with shaggy black hair had barged his way to the front. "Opeo the door!" he shouted. "This is a disgrace! This is a violation of the people."

He banged his tripod against the window, then reached down and sounded the coach horn.

Among the things I had been told before coming to Nagano was the fact that Japanese can appear verbally vague to Western visitors and have a particularly marked aversion to saying the word "No."

But as the horn blared, and the Frenchman raved, this particular Japanese person was able to overcome that national reticence. "Open the door now!" the photographer demanded. "No, no, no!" replied the driver, staring him out.

At this point, the coach was in tumult, and a tall Pole was desperately trying to engage the attention of passers-by by holding a notice to the windows.

"Help," it read. "We are kidnapped by driver!"

If that was so, our kidnapper - clearly under orders to

drop media representatives only at official stops - was a man in torment.

Suddenly his attention was caught by something happening half-way down the coach. A journalist had slid open one of the large safety windows and was disappearing backwards from the vehicle.

Torn between the impulses to shut the window and remain at his post, our driver was now experiencing perhaps the worst moment of his entire life.

The stuff of fresh air was too much for me and my British colleague - we too left by the unofficial side exit. And as we trod the dazzling snow, my friend started humming the theme from The Great Escape.

I am glad for protocol, because seeing it breached is such fun.

Downhill surprise by Cretier

Winter Olympics

By Garth Moore

JEAN-LUC CRETIER pulled off a major upset yesterday when he won the men's downhill in Nagano after the favourite, Hermann Maier, suffered a horrific fall.

The customs officer's victory was a major upset by a man unaccustomed to success. The 31-year-old, who has never won a major downhill, defied the formidable Austrian team to give France their first downhill title since the great Jean-Claude Killy won on home snow in Grenoble in 1968. Cretier made the most of his early start number to clock a time of 1min 50.11sec. Norway's Lasse Kjus, the defending Olympic combined champion, came second with 1:50.51 with Austria's Hannes Trinkl third in 1:50.63.

Maier survived spinning into the air after just 18 seconds of his run down the and cartwheeling over on to his shoulder. He careered through the two sets of safety netting before somersaulting into heavy snow well off the course. He picked himself up groggily and after a moment signalled that he was uninjured.

The Austrian had won 10 times in the World Cup this season, including two downhills, and was a favourite, not only for this event but all the alpine gold medals, but after the accident he pulled out of the combined downhill, having finished seventh in the slalom.

Could his misfortune have had anything to do with the date, Friday the 13th, or the fact that he was wearing the unlucky Japanese number of Four - or Shi, which means death.

Another Austrian hopeful, Andreas Schifferer, the current World Cup downhill leader, had to wait for 11 minutes as course marshals rebuilt the fencing.

The 23-year-old, who survived a near fatal crash in Kitzbühel two years ago, appeared to be shaken by watching Maier's crash - the two men

are close friends, sharing a room on the World Cup circuit. Schifferer was off Cretier's pace at the first check point and continued to fall further behind to finish out of the medals.

Graham Bell also missed a place on the podium, but he earned a place in the records by becoming the first man to race in five consecutive Olympic downhills. He was 23rd of the 28 finishers - four places ahead of Paul Schwarzbacher-Joyce, Ireland's sole competitor at the Games. The British No 1, Andrew Freshwater, missed an early gate.

Tommy Moe, the American defending champion, had a bad draw. In the sunny conditions, the course was breaking up because of the bright sunshine by the time he went down 17th and he had no hope of retaining his title. He clocked 1:51.43.

The Austrians gave a measure of revenge in the combined when Mario Reiter took the title on a spectacular Olympic debut. The 27-year-old Austrian, who led after the slalom, held off the challenge of Kjus and his teammate, Christian Mayer.

Whether or not success will change Reiter's life, Ross Rebagliati said he is ready to alter his lifestyle after nearly losing his snowboarding gold medal. The 26-year-old Canadian was cleared of wrongdoing on appeal after testing positive for marijuana following Sunday's giant slalom. Sitting with the medal around his neck, Rebagliati told of his relief at being able to keep the gold, as well as his shock at the initial news he was going to lose his title.

"Winning the medal was the best moment of my life - losing it was the worst moment of my life," he said. "It all happened in a short amount of time. It was an amazing feeling - quite a ride."

"Life is a learning process - if you make bad decisions you have to deal with that. I'm going to change my lifestyle, I'm not going to change my friends. But I might have to wear a gas mask from now on."



Jean-Luc Cretier on his way to the gold medal at Hakuba yesterday

Photograph: Pascal Pavan/AFP

'Great One' enjoys his new surroundings

Mike Rowbottom sees Wayne Gretzky, the NHL giant, make his Olympic debut

ONE MOMENT early in the second period of the United States' opening match against Sweden here yesterday indicated that the seriousness with which the highly paid National Hockey League players are taking the Olympics.

It came when Adam Deadmarsh, one of the 125 NHL players taking part in the Games for the first time, slammed his Colorado Avalanche team-mate Peter Forsberg into the boards.

Deadmarsh and Forsberg are good friends. They play golf, together, they go bowling together. They even ride Harley Davidsons together. But no flicker of recognition passed between them.

Forsberg had the last laugh, as Sweden, the defending Olympic champions, came from behind to defeat the US 4-2. The Americans, who have not won an Olympic medal since their college boys overcame the Soviet side and took the title in 1980, have another testing time today against Canada, easy 5-0 winners over Belarus in their opening match.

Canada's presence assures the Olympics of the man their coach, Marc Crawford, described after the Belarus game as "one of the highest-statured athletes of these Games" - Wayne Gretzky.

The summer Olympics annexed its "Dream Team", by clearing entry for the top National Basketball Association players; now the Winter Games has secured itself several Dream Teams and - in Gretzky - the exact opposite, the player known as "The Great One".

There were only echoes of greatness from the NHL's all-time record points and goalscorer as he made his Olympic debut at the age of 37.

The more obviously rumbustious commitment to the cause came from his captain, Eric Lindros, who found time to score two goals when he was not bending the boards with the nearest Belarusian.

Lindros went too far in the last couple of minutes when he launched Andrei Skabelka into an orbit which matched that of Hermann Maier's earlier in the day. The Canadian was sent to the sin-bin for two minutes.

At 5ft 11in, Gretzky is five inches smaller than Lindros and appears a comparatively slight figure on an ice hockey rink. His face, like his game, is all angles - a long chin, quirky eyebrows and a nose that could be he Pinocchio's.

The Great One could not quite score on his long-awaited Olympic debut - although one snap-shot in the third period nearly changed that - but the

man in his trademark 99 shirt showed enough finesse and composure to indicate why he is still a profound influence on the Canadian cause. Like great football players, he has mysterious access to those rare commodities, space and time.

The serious back injury he suffered five years ago is said to have taken the edge off his game. But the only sign he gave of it yesterday was during the changes of personnel. While his younger team-mates vaulted to and fro over the barrier, Gretzky was more sedate - he used the gate.

Earlier in the week, the Italian player Dino Felicetti provided a little measure of the way in which Gretzky is revered throughout the game. "It's an honour being here," Felicetti said. "I saw him in the athletes' village this morning and it gave me the shivers."

Gretzky, who is reputed to have earned more than \$100m

(£62.5m) from the game in a career that has seen him play for the Edmonton Oilers, the LA Kings, the St Louis Blues and his current NHL team the New York Rangers, seemed genuinely thrilled to be participating at the Games.

He is staying at the Olympic village, sharing a room with his team-mate Rod Brind'Amour, and happy to be doing so.

"Before we came, people said we weren't going to like the village because it was so small," he said.

"But it has been the exact opposite. It is great to be in this environment."

"We have a little room where we can watch re-runs of the television coverage, and we have got to meet all the other athletes."

When asked to consider the chances of his earning a gold medal here a week tomorrow, Gretzky was upbeat, but he acknowledged that the European-style ice rinks - which have 2,500 square feet more than the typical NHL playing surface - could be an important factor.

"There is a lot more room on this ice than we expected," he said. "Sometimes we got the puck in areas where we play by instinct, and we found we were a lot further from the net than we were used to. It took a bit of an adjustment."

"No one team here is a clear cut above everyone else," he added. "To do well you have to have a good team system, but there are players who can build on that and make a team special."

He made it clear he was referring to Sweden, and Peter Forsberg. Most of those listening were thinking of someone else.



Canada's Wayne Gretzky celebrates a goal against Belarus yesterday

Photograph: Reuters

Olympic results

ALPINE SKIING

MEN'S DOWNHILL

1 Jean-Luc Cretier (Fr) 1min 50.11sec
2 Lasse Kjus (Nor) 1:50.51
3 Hannes Trinkl (Aut) 1:50.63
4 J. Gruber (Ger) 1:50.71
5 P. Schifferer (Austria) 1:50.77
6 O. Cuche (Swi) 1:50.91
7 A. Schifferer (Austria) 1:51.22
8 B. Maier (Austria) 1:51.22
9 G. Bell (USA) 1:51.33
10 J. Maier (Austria) 1:51.33
11 P. Schwarzbacher-Joyce 1:51.33

MEN'S COMBINED DOWNHILL

1 Mario Reiter (Aut) 3:08.06
2 Lasse Kjus (Nor) 3:08.06
3 Christian Mayer (Aut) 3:10.11
4 G. Maier (Aut) 3:10.11
5 A. Schifferer (Austria) 3:10.11
6 P. Schifferer (Austria) 3:10.11
7 A. Schifferer (Austria) 3:10.11
8 P. Schifferer (Austria) 3:10.11
9 P. Schifferer (Austria) 3:10.11
10 J. Maier (Austria) 3:10.11
11 P. Schwarzbacher-Joyce 3:10.11

NORDIC SKIING

COMBINED (after 90m ski jumping):

1 B. Maier (Austria) 2:07.20
2 V. Schneider (Rus) 2:07.20
3 S. T. Oja (Fin) 2:07.20
4 J. Kjus (Nor) 2:07.20
5 C. Bell (USA) 2:07.20
6 P. Schifferer (Austria) 2:07.20
7 A. Schifferer (Austria) 2:07.20
8 P. Schifferer (Austria) 2:07.20
9 P. Schifferer (Austria) 2:07.20
10 J. Maier (Austria) 2:07.20
11 P. Schwarzbacher-Joyce 2:07.20

CURLING

MEN'S PRELIMINARY ROUND: Switzerland 2 Sweden 1; Norway 10 Canada 3; Japan 7 Germany 5; USA 6 GB 3. Final standings: 1 Canada (WG, L); 2 Norway; 3 Switzerland (5-2); 4 Japan; 5 Sweden; 6 USA (2-4); 7 GB (2-3); 8 Germany (1-6). The British USA 5 Sweden

WOMEN'S FINAL PRELIMINARY

Norway 2; Sweden 1; Japan 2; Germany 3; Austria 4; Switzerland 5; Canada 6; Sweden 7; Sweden 8; Sweden 9; Sweden 10; Sweden 11; Sweden 12; Sweden 13; Sweden 14; Sweden 15; Sweden 16; Sweden 17; Sweden 18; Sweden 19; Sweden 20; Sweden 21; Sweden 22; Sweden 23; Sweden 24; Sweden 25; Sweden 26; Sweden 27; Sweden 28; Sweden 29; Sweden 30; Sweden 31; Sweden 32; Sweden 33; Sweden 34; Sweden 35; Sweden 36; Sweden 37; Sweden 38; Sweden 39; Sweden 40; Sweden 41; Sweden 42; Sweden 43; Sweden 44; Sweden 45; Sweden 46; Sweden 47; Sweden 48; Sweden 49; Sweden 50; Sweden 51; Sweden 52; Sweden 53; Sweden 54; Sweden 55; Sweden 56; Sweden 57; Sweden 58; Sweden 59; Sweden 60; Sweden 61; Sweden 62; Sweden 63; Sweden 64; Sweden 65; Sweden 66; Sweden 67; Sweden 68; Sweden 69; Sweden 70; Sweden 71; Sweden 72; Sweden 73; Sweden 74; Sweden 75; Sweden 76; Sweden 77; Sweden 78; Sweden 79; Sweden 80; Sweden 81; Sweden 82; Sweden 83; Sweden 84; Sweden 85; Sweden 86; Sweden 87; Sweden 88; Sweden 89; Sweden 90; Sweden 91; 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United States

AROUND
THE
WORLD
BY
RUPERT
METCALF

However, more sober observers did put the defeat in perspective. Although Romario was no the field, and was regularly thwarted by a brilliant

The Nations' Cup holders, South Africa, have been in poor form so far, having been held to draws by both Angola and Ivory Coast. The group fixtures conclude on Tuesday, with the quarter-finals starting on Friday.

Tomorrow Japan play their first friendly since they qualified for France 98 by beating Iran in an Asian Zone play-off in November. They meet Australia in Adelaide, in what is widely expected to be Terry Venables' last match in charge of the Socceroos. His Japanese counterpart, Takeshi

Okada, has a squad of 40 players all desperate to make the final World Cup squad of 22. "Being the off season for the J-League, many of the players may not be at their peak just yet but the competition for places in the final World Cup team is enough motivation to spur the players on," he said yesterday. He added that Australia's physical strength was the most worrying aspect for his side as they prepared for tomorrow's match.

Rupert Metcalf

If they lose, however, he will be killed as Brazil's "Save the Gaffer Fund", formed to raise the £1,000,000 ransom demanded for their manager, has been closed with a debt of £430,000. The follows the disastrous fund-raising dinner on the Sludgegothorpe Canal which ended with the boat sinking after Luciano Pavarotti was helicopter on board to sing Nessim Dorma as the finale. No lives were lost but the cost of the boat, and the £250,000 of jewellery Lady Firem, the

less of Gane's fate.

Sir Hirem did say that both Ivor Niggle and Shaun Prooce would be rested today as the little green meo he met at the petrol station had told him they looked tired.

Instead he will play his oephew, Nepotate Firem, and Broccoli Moore, who has been released on bail pending his appeal against assaulting a police officer's house with a Christmas Tree.

Sludgethorpe Brazil; Panic; Ganja, Pilsen,
Off, Fire; Rasta, Spice, Smith; Moore;
Massive, Unstanz.



Photograph: AJ

- It was not an easy decision to take. I can tell you that. Options were quite split. François Carrard, IOC director general, on the decision, later reversed, to take away Ross Rebagliati's snowboarding gold medal after he tested positive for cannabis.
- Ross deserves that medal, man. It was bullshit to take away the gold from him for a little joint. He had the biggest rush of his life and crushed the opposition. Daniel Franck, Norwegian snowboarder.
- We had a party, we had fun, something got broken. It's not cool, but it happened. Martin Freudenmetz, Austrian world champion snowboarder, after being thrown out of the Olympics following a wild party in a hotel lobby, after which he "borrowed" an official snowmobile.
- A player of ours has been proven guilty of biting – that is a scar which will never heal. Andy Robinson, Bath coach, on the Kevin Yates ear-biting affair (following which, presumably, the scar of victim Simon Fenn will also never heal).
- I've always liked it that my career hasn't been in a Test match. It really means something, and I've always said that if I got near to doing it in a county match I would throw the ball to someone else. Angus Fraser, England bowler, after taking 11 wickets in the second Test.
- For an 18-year-old, he has a lot of arrogance about him. But he's special and we must keep his feet firmly nailed to the floor. John Aldridge, Trainers Rovers manager, on his club's young goalkeeper-in-prospect, Steve Simonsen.

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Why Owen's rise to the top is a statistical freak of nature

ANYONE who woke up to Virgin Radio on Thursday will have heard Chris Evans say: "A big hello to all the girls at Wembley last night, especially the 11 on the pitch", which was harsh. OK, it was a toothless performance by England, but the experimental value of the encounter seemed lost on Evans, who's become a football luvvie since befriending Gazza. So did the fact that Michael Owen, who Evans predicted would only play half the game because his mum was expecting him home by 9pm, came of age.

Liverpool's 18-year-old striker commanded almost as many column inches this week as Iraq's 61 year old president, and his performance justified the hype. But frankly, it's not so much Owen's emergence that's surprising as the fact the former England schoolboy sensation has emerged at this level at all.

It might sound a scathing indictment of the youth system in this country, but according to Mick Burns, chief executive of the Footballers' Federation and Vocational Training Society (he runs the clubs' youth training schemes) most England schoolboys don't make it as professional footballers.

There are 150 centres of excellence in the country registering 15,000 boys each, yet just 2,300 professional players. That is a success rate of less than one per cent.

Football, in other words, has one of the highest failure rates of any industry, a statistic that sounds less desperate when you consider that the late teenage years are traumatic for any boy, let alone a footballing prodigy. Both physical and mental elements determine who makes it and who doesn't, but Burns claims it's mainly "in the lap of the gods. I've

seen boys of 14 whose development suggests a really bright future, but when just can't take the final step, and others who struggle through the early years but who easily make the grade. There's no logic to it."

Those who have made the grade in recent years include Nick Barmby, Phil Neville and the former Ryan Wilson, who wears Giggs on his back for Manchester United and Wales, but who once captained England Schoolboys at Wembley.

According to John Owens, manager of England Schoolboys for three years until the end of last season, it's easy to spot the stars - with hindsight: "So much happens to a boy in terms of his development after 15 that it's almost impossible to gauge whether a schoolboy will make it. Some boys mature early and show up well during matches, but when they move on, they don't

OLIVIA BLAIR



ON THE RARE ROUTE FROM SCHOOLBOY TO INTERNATIONAL

have enough of an understanding of the game to progress. I worked with Robbie Fowler and Steve McNamara at North-West Boys and at

15 they weren't up to full scale matches. They caught up later."

You need application and dedication, as much as natural ability, to make it to the top, and Michael Owen is blessed with all three. That much was obvious to Owens, who watched the young striker score 12 goals in eight games for England Schoolboys in 1995.

But despite the high fall-out rate among 15-year-olds, Owens also expects great things of Michael Owen's contemporary, Wes Brown, a defender close to making the breakthrough with Manchester United. That's despite the fact defenders are disadvantaged because of the greater element of physique in their game than a striker's.

Lilleshall, the national school which nurtured Barmby and Owen, will be disbanded at the end of next year as part of William Wilkinsons

blueprint for the future of the game. But not before it produces three boys from whom Owens expects great things: a midfielder attached to West Ham called Jo Cole who was the star of 1997's crop of schoolboys, and two from the current crop Liverpool's Chris O'Brien and Arsenal's Rhys Weston.

But although schoolboy football is, by definition, a totally different ball game to the one played by the pros, there is one similarity - even the schoolboys do battle with Germany. In 1995, England's finest 15-year-olds, Michael Owen among them, were humbled 4-2 by Germany. They were beaten again the following year, but got revenge last year in a 2-1 victory which suggests to Owens that the boys are doing better than they used to.

That's still not to suggest, however, that England Schoolboys will

ever wear proper caps. Nor does playing for England at B or under-21 level guarantee a full cap either - a fact that evidently preyed on Chris Sutton's mind. While Sutton's decision to pull out of the B squad cannot be condoned, the omens didn't look good. Football's record books are littered with the names of players who represented England at under-21 and B Level but no higher; among them Vince Hilaire, John Lukic, Garth Crooks, Paul Bracewell and Paul Davis. At least Sutton got one cap.

Unluckiest of all was surely Gary Owen, star of Manchester City's midfield in the 1970s. Owen hung up his boots holding the unwanted record for having won the most number of under-21 caps (22), but never a full one. His namesake's career will doubtless be rather more fulfilling.

We're sinking fast but whose hand is on the tiller?

WE'RE a tolerant lot down at Selhurst Park. What other supporters would accept the worst home record in the country with hardly a murmur of protest?

Crystal Palace are on course to become the first club in the history of the professional game in England to go a whole season without a home league win, yet even during Monday's abysmal 3-0 defeat by Wimbledon the only public expressions of discontent were a brief chorus of "what a load of rubbish" and, at the end, some booing and jeers, directed mainly at Steve Coppell, the manager.

Perhaps it's because we've been here before, as we contemplate our third relegation from the top flight in five years. In particular, this has unpleasant echoes of three seasons ago, when Alan Smith's collection of talented youngsters - it's still painful to imagine how a team including Southgate, Martyn, Armstrong, Coleman, Shaw and Salako could have been relegated - went down after a season poisoned by the manager's disintegrating relationship with his chairman, Ron Noades.

Ah yes, Big Ron. This time around the question is not so much his dealings with the manager - Coppell and Noades have worked successfully together for many years - but how the two men (Coppell in particular) will fit in with Mark Goldberg, the moneybags fan who hopes to complete his £27m purchase of the club from Noades later this month.

When he apparently financed the purchase of Attilio Lombardo last year, Goldberg was hailed as our answer to Jack Walker. Recent weeks have made some of us not so sure.

Reports that Goldberg may want to move Coppell upstairs and replace him with either Gerry Francis or Terry Venables (no thank you) must have unsettled the team, despite the loyal Coppell's refusal in this week's club programme to blame the side's form on speculation surrounding the future of the club.

Coppell's notes - "This is probably my last chance, and one of the few occasions, to speak about the takeover at Palace" - read depressingly like a valediction, though it is hard to believe he does not have the backing of Noades, who, it seems, would continue to run the club on a day-to-day basis if Goldberg's takeover goes through.

While few would deny Goldberg's right eventually to appoint the manager he wants, this is surely not the time to rock the boat. Right now - with more than a third of the season left and our Premiership future there to be secured or lost - he should be giving unconditional backing to the most successful manager in the club's history, the man who returned to take over a floundering team a year ago and won us promotion, the man who inspired memorable victories at Everton, Leeds, Sheffield Wednesday and Tottenham earlier in the season.

The fact is that Coppell's plans have been wrecked by an appalling catalogue of injuries,

FAN'S EYE VIEW NO 244

CRYSTAL PALACE BY SUE DONATO

although this should hardly have come as a complete surprise after the club started investing heavily in ageing and injury-prone players.

Although we had little time to strengthen the squad after securing promotion via the play-offs last summer and the departure of David Hopkin was a cruel blow, our activity in the transfer market has been bewildering.

Since last summer we have signed only one player who had any previous Premiership experience, Paul Warhurst, who is currently injured (enough said). Apart from him, a staggering sum of around £12m has been spent on other players who had never played in the Premiership: Valeriu Ismael, Yitzhak Zohar, Lombardo, Michele Padovano, Kevin Miller, Neil Embilen, Jamie Smith, Herman Hreidarrson, Marcus Bent and Matt Jansen.

Lombardo looked good when fit and Hreidarrson has settled in well, but of the rest the best that can be said is that the jury is still out.

Zohar was so useless that the club released him after buying him for £1.2m less than six months earlier, while Ismael, a club record £2.75m purchase from Strasbourg (struggling at the bottom of the French First Division), was substituted after his woeful "defending" led to all three of Wimbledon's goals on Monday. Embilen, a £2m purchase from Wolves, seems to get into the team only when Coppell has run out of all other options.

The likes of Danny Wilson at Barnsley must be shaking their heads and wondering what they might have done given half the money Palace have spent on players. The supporters, meanwhile, are looking for answers to a number of questions.

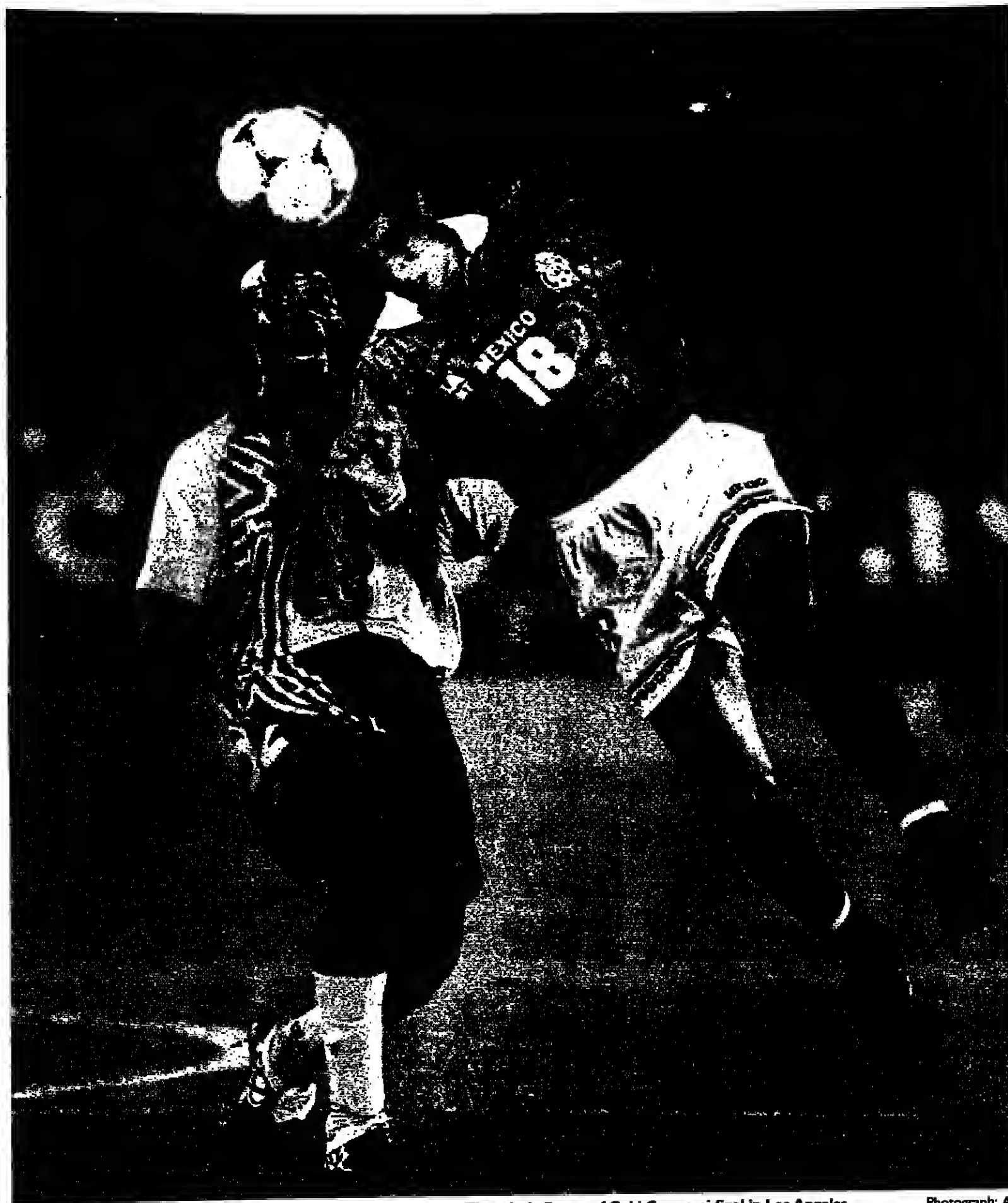
Have all this season's new arrivals been bought at the instigation (or even with the approval) of Coppell? When asked recently if he had been trying to buy two particular players (one of whom, Jansen, signed this week) he suggested the question should be addressed to Noades.

Has Big Ron (who, to be fair, knows more about the game than the vast majority of chairmen) gone on a final spending spree, expecting that someone else will eventually pick up the tab?

Has Goldberg - perhaps having decided that if it is going to be his money he might as well buy players he likes - been playing the ultimate game of fantasy football?

Or have Noades and Goldberg been working together, on the basis that they are a better judge of player than a man who played 42 times for England and has been in management for more than 10 years?

Answers on a postcard please to CPFC, c/o the Nationwide League.



Mexico's Salvador Carrmona (right) beats Paul Hall, of Jamaica, in Thursday's Concacaf Gold Cup semi-final in Los Angeles

Photograph: AP

MAJOR FIXTURES AND POOLS CHECK

TODAY

2.0 unless stated

FA Cup fifth round

1. Aston Villa v Coventry
2. Sheffield Utd v Reading
3. Leeds v Birmingham
4. Newcastle v Tottenham
5. West Ham v Bradford
6. Wimbledon v Wolves

5 Played yesterday (match void)

FA Carling Premiership

1. Everton v Derby
2. Sheffield Wed v Liverpool
3. Tottenham v Leicester

Nationwide League

First Division

7. Crewe v Portsmouth
8. Ipswich v Huddersfield
9. Manchester City v Bury
10. Middlesbrough v Bradford
11. Port Vale v Norwich
12. Stockport v Stoke
13. West Bromwich v QPR

Second Division

14. Blackpool v Millwall
15. Bournemouth v Chesterfield
16. Brentford v Preston
17. Bristol City v Gillingham
18. Carlisle v Walsley
19. Northampton v Southampton
20. Oldham v Fulham
21. Plymouth v York
22. Watford v Luton (2.0)
23. Wigan v Grimsby
24. Wrexham v Barnet
25. Wycombe v Burnley

Third Division

26. Barnet v Cardiff
27. Brighton v Doncaster
28. Darlington v Notts County
29. Hartlepool v Chester
30. Huddersfield v Leyton Orient
31. Rotherham v Shrewsbury
32. Scarborough v Exeter
33. Southport v Rochdale
34. Swanssea v Peterborough
35. Torquay v Hull

Tennants Scottish Cup

Fourth round

1. Ross County v Dundee
2. Ar v Kilmarnock
3. Motherwell v Rangers
4. Dundee Utd v Inverness CT
5. Hearts v Albion Rovers
6. Raith Rovers v Falkirk
7. St Johnstone v Springburn

Bell's Scottish League

First Division

1. Morton v Hamilton

Second Division

1. Clyde v Livingston
2. Clydebank v Stranraer
3. Stirling Albion v Brechin

Third Division

1. Berwick v Cowdenbeath
2. East Fife v Dundee United
3. Queen's Park v Montrose

GM Vauxhall Conference

1. Cheltenham v Stevenage
2. Dover v Halifax
3. Gillingham v Rushden (2.0)
4. Hayes v York
5. Hereford v Macclesfield
6. Kidderminster v Southport
7. Leek v Hednesford
8. Northwich v Slough
9. Taunton v Welling
10. Woking v Kettering

Dr Martens League

Premier Division

1. Ashford v Haringham Town
2. Burton Albion v Crawley
3. Cambridge City v Bromsgrove
4. Martham v Alton
5. Nuneaton v Worcester

FA Cup fifth round

1. Arsenal v Crystal Palace (2.0)
2. Manchester Utd v Barnsley (4.0)

Bell's Scottish League

Second Division

1. East Fife v Queen of the South (2.0)

Weekend fixture guide

TODAY

Football

2.0 unless stated

RYMAN LEAGUE Premier Division

1. Aldershot v Boreham Wood
2. Boreham Wood v Boreham Wood
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Gullit departs with a bravura display

Ruud Gullit was by turns thoughtful, angry and emotional. Glenn Moore reflects on another fascinating day of Chelsea politics

THE Chelsea manager thought he had done a good job and, when he went into a meeting with the club's officials he thought it was to discuss his contract for the next few years. Instead he was asked to leave. "I had no inclination of what was coming," he said later.

That was David Webb in May 1993, dispensed with by Ken Bates after saving the club from relegation during a three-month "trial period". His dismissal did not even make the back pages of most of the following day's papers with Webb's brief statement buried amid speculation on his successor.

Five years on the only similarity is the manager's surprise. Ruud Gullit held a two-hour press conference yesterday which was emblematic of the changes at Chelsea in particular and English football in general. The location was evidence enough, a dining club in Kensington just across the road from a Pizza Hut restaurant awash with images of Gullit, their advertising vehicle.

Inside the club almost 150 media representatives scrambled over sofas and tables, even standing on the bar itself, as Gullit held court. Some settled for watching Sky's live broadcast in the other bar, unable to see past the 15 television crews that ringed the table where Gullit sat, elegant in a fashionably cut dark suit, flanked by his agents. A phalanx of photographers crouched below him and journalists from Europe and beyond waited on every word. The thought occurred that if only the International Sportsman's Club had been as busy in its previous guise, as Scribes West, Terry Venables would still be running it.

But this was an exceptional event, as Gullit made clear. "I have never been treated like this before," he said. "I am still in shock especially when you consider what I've done for Chelsea. I thought everything was going well. I am really disappointed. I had given Chelsea my word. It was a day I can't forget."

Gullit admitted to having had a sleepless night as he asked himself the reasons for his departure. But after 20 years in the game he had made the belated discovery that, in the world of football, even genius will not protect for ever.

There was a trace of the arrogance possessed by all great players when he said "After all I did for Chelsea", but generally it was a bravura performance alternately sad, shocked, bewildered and close to tears but also funny and thoughtful with the obligatory, but heartfelt mention of the late Matthew Harding.

There was anger also, not just as he recounted his version of events but as he traded accusations with Italian journalists who pressed him on his attitude to Gianluca Vialli. Then, bizarrely, it ended with handshakes and mutual expressions of "good luck" and "ciao" as the daily press ended their session and Gullit was ushered into yet another room for interviews with the Sunday correspondents.

Gullit is probably correct when he asserts that his exit is not just about money although that is surely a prime factor. There also appears to be a personality clash with Ken Bates, the chairman, a dispute over his commitment and methods and an awareness that the uncertainty over the future may hinder the grand plans of Chelsea Village plc.

Chelsea yesterday claimed it would have cost them nearly £3.5m a year to keep Gullit. Their rent-a-



Facing an uncertain future: Ruud Gullit at his press conference yesterday - "I am still in shock, especially when you consider what I've done for Chelsea"



Photographs: Peter Jay

quote "insider" David Mellor chipped in by calling Gullit "greedy". If true, and Gullit admits his opening negotiating gambit was a request for £2m-a-year (£3.5m gross if he meant £2m net) it looks that way but there is a mitigating factor and a dis-

Mellor said that Gullit "could not understand that great players earn more than great managers." He is not the only one. The highest paid manager in the country is generally believed to be Alex Ferguson at an approximate salary, including hefty and well-earned

bonuses, of about £750,000 per annum.

Ferguson had a long struggle, involving a certain amount of brinkmanship, to get that out of the club plc's remuneration board but it is unlikely to be United's highest wage (quite apart from the fortune

Martin Edwards, the chairman, has made from the club). Yet before Ferguson arrived United were perennial underachievers rather than the game's dominant force. Their current millions are due, above all, to his judgement and efforts.

Brian Clough, understandably,

was another who found it hard to accept his players were paid more than him and this was before the explosion in wages. Thus the Gullit problem with Chelsea seeking to pay him as a manager, not a player-manager (Gullit, incidentally, claimed his salary, around £800,000, possibly

net, had not changed when he took on the management duties).

The dissenting factor is Chelsea's previous recognition that Gullit is not money-orientated. In August Hutchinson told me Gullit had not even collected his wages in his first two months at the club. "You look after them," he had said, "recalled the chief executive, adding: "He didn't come here for the money. He could have gone to Japan for that."

At that stage Chelsea seemed happy with a system which meant Gullit took training, picked the team and identified and interviewed transfer targets but left the nitty-gritty to Hutchinson, Graham Rix, the coach, and Gwyn Williams, the assistant manager. Now, in the wake of some poor results (Chelsea have won twice in nine) and internal dissension among players, they cite it as a reason to release him.

Gullit's lack of preparation has occasionally been exposed. He is an excellent reader of the game but he has not always been able to repair the damage done by poor team selection in mid-match. That he was also attending a coaching course in the Netherlands which appears specifically designed to equip him for the Dutch national coach's job did not help.

While Chelsea's dissatisfaction has simmered for a while, the final act was swift. Last Thursday, said Gullit, he and Hutchinson met for the first time in three months to discuss the new contract. Gullit had previously asked for a delay, citing his imminent fatherhood and the need to concentrate on the team.

He asked for £2m [net, rather than gross according to Hutchinson] just as he had in the summer of 1995, when asked to join Chelsea, and expected a counter offer as happened then when negotiations were concluded in 15 minutes.

"But they didn't offer me anything and didn't speak to me for a week about it. That made me suspicious. Then I found out about Laudrup and asked myself 'what was going on?'"

According to Gullit, Laudrup had been due to meet him and Hutchinson on Monday but had cried off as his wife was ill. Then Gullit heard he had been in London on Wednesday with Hutchinson, Vialli and Gianfranco Zola and been told Gullit was "too busy" to see him.

On Thursday Hutchinson turned up at Chelsea's Heathrow training ground. "He told me the board had made the decision [to sack me] and I told him he couldn't hide behind the board, that he knew about the meeting with Laudrup, and I left. I didn't know that Luca Vialli was taking over until I read it on Teletext."

Gullit wished Vialli "luck" yesterday, which provoked a few laughs among a press corps which has charted the pair's estrangement for more than a year. He also set his successor an unwanted standard: "My target was the championship. With the material you have, you have to achieve this."

This may or may not include the much-admired Dutch defender Jaap Stam, of PSV Eindhoven, who Gullit said Chelsea were negotiating to buy for £10m.

Gullit's final meeting with Bates took place on Thursday evening, and was brief. "There was no way I was going to ask him to reconsider. There was no way back. He knew what was going on. It's about pride. I wanted to stay and finish things but now I know how these people really are maybe it's better that I go now, rather than having to keep working with these people."

Webb has expressed equally disenchanting views on Bates in the past but the chairman's decision to replace him, initially with Glenn Hoddle, has long been vindicated. Only time will tell if Bates' latest change of manager, his seventh in 15 years as chairman, is equally successful.

How much is a manager worth?

CONTRARY to his protests, Ruud Gullit's departure from Stamford Bridge had everything to do with money, City experts said yesterday. The consensus, however, was not that the Dutchman himself was at fault for requesting £2m a year, but that the wage system as a whole needs restructuring.

Nick Batram, a City sport and leisure analyst, said that clubs were only just starting to realise that the wage spiral cannot be sustained. "Clubs are saying 'We're not going to have a gun to our heads,'" he said. He added that salaries have expanded too fast, and that in business terms, they are unsustainable.

The issue of managers' wages, however, is clouded by the fact that they are generally lower than those of the highest paid players at each club, despite the fact that ultimate responsibility for success lies with the manager, and the manager is arguably more valuable for his team-building skills than any individual player is for his ability on the pitch. The loss of a player as influential as

Ruud Gullit's wage demands are not simply greed. City analysts say the whole business of football needs to change. **Nick Harris reports**

Roy Keane at Manchester United has not halted the champions' progress, but the loss of Alex Ferguson, the manager, would not easily be overcome.

The highest paid manager in England is Newcastle's Kenny Dalglish, believed to earn £1m a year, while Ferguson is thought to earn £750,000 at United. At the top end of the British players' salary levels, Paul Gascoigne is estimated to earn £2m each year at Rangers.

Nick Batram said football is less a part of the business world and more an entertainment industry. As such, its big names are valuable as assets in themselves. "The producer of a motion picture is not going to earn as much as the main star," said Batram. That is one reason, he added, that players command higher wages than managers. Players also have

fewer earning years and higher chances of career curtailment.

Managers, said Batram, should be paid on the basis of what they achieve (and hence a club can afford), not on the grounds of perhaps unrealistic aims. "Everything above [a basic salary] would be a performance-related bonus," he said. It would not mean that Gullit would be unable to earn £2m a year, but it would be conditional on his fulfilling his potential. The Leicester City manager, Martin O'Neill, is believed to have a contract heavily weighted towards performance, although the extent of the practice throughout the game is not known.

John Barnwell, the chief executive of the League Managers' Association, feels managers should be aware that every club has its wage limit. "It would appear that Gullit's demands stretched Chelsea too far,

and that's why they have taken the step that they have. That's their decision, but it's a warning to people that it's not a bottomless pit."

However, Barnwell is supportive of managers being paid what they are worth. "They help put the team together, and without them the product might not be as good as it is."

Alex Fynn, the sports industry consultant who wrote the commercial blueprint for the Premiership league, said that although £2m is an excessive basic salary for a manager to demand, it is the chairman of clubs who are ultimately to blame. "What is happening is that wages are rising faster than income and chairman are having to find money."

"They [Premiership clubs] have mortgaged their future on the basis of success in which the players call the shots." Ultimately, he said that high wages were not a problem for anyone except the owners of the businesses. "No one minds the money they're paid - colleagues or fans. Perhaps the only people who do, balance the books at the end of the day."

Vialli's overriding priority is to bring the team together

AS I write this, Ruud Gullit is assembling the world's press in a London hotel to give his version of the extraordinary events of Thursday afternoon. He will, simultaneously, throw the club into a new state of turmoil, one which even the most battle-hardened and cynical of Chelsea stalwarts can scarcely fathom or have anticipated.

Gullit's role in the transformation of the club's fortunes, both on and off the pitch, cannot be underestimated. He inherited a team who, despite the best efforts of Glenn Hoddle, were still the perennial "sleeping giant". During his stewardship of the team, our scope appeared limitless, our financial and sporting goals sufficient to tempt the world's finest to leave the Italy, France, the Netherlands et al to come to plain old Chelsea, SW10.

Despite rumours of dressing room disquiet with the squad system and the now doubly ironic spat with Vialli, Chelsea won the FA Cup last year. Gullit's place in the pantheon

Despite the exit of Ruud Gullit, Chelsea fan Andy Prevezer says the revolution must continue

of Chelsea heroes was assured. All was, and would be, forgiven.

This season, however, despite a falsely elevated position in the table and still in two cups, all has patently not been well. The players haven't looked happy. Gullit's team selections have become increasingly bizarre and once his contract renegotiation hit on its first public stumbling block Chelsea fans began to fear the worst was about to occur.

The club have been dragged once more into an unseemly spat with a fallen idol, conducted through the media. It's become another in a long line of Chelsea soap operas, with the irascible Ken Bates once more in the director's chair. Vialli has picked up the poisoned

chalice and one hopes, for everyone's sake, but particularly for him, that we emerge from this season with some tangible success. He is, without question, an immensely likeable and astute individual whose coaching credentials have, I genuinely believe, been noted prior to this débacle (and not merely as an afterthought). Bringing the team together after this unedifying débacle must be his first priority.

Sides will be taken in the coming days. There are those already accusing Gullit of "hubris", of believing himself bigger than the club, that his greed and arrogance have precipitated his own demise. And there are those who, as always, will blame the board for allowing the promise of Chelsea's renaissance to be jeopardised.

Either way, the revolution must be allowed to continue. The club, and all associated with it, have come too far to turn back now. As Ken Bates said yesterday, the King is dead, long live the King.



SPORT

Saturday 14 February 1998

Third Test: Paceman's treble strike rocks West Indies to save Atherton from first day struggle

Fraser rides to England's rescue

Derek Pringle
reports from Port of Spain

West Indies 127-4
v England

MICHAEL ATHERTON is not by nature a gambler. If he was, England would surely have batted first on the second of the Queen's Park Oval pitches. Instead, the England captain followed the general consensus and put his opponents to bat, a ploy that was heading towards disaster until Angus Fraser retrieved the situation with three quick wickets after lunch.

The England captain's record is not a good one as far as inserting the opposition is concerned, and bowling first would have probably been against his better instincts. But force of circumstance, as well as sheer weight of opinion around him, clearly persuaded him it was the right thing to do, although there was probably an element of not wanting the West Indies bowlers to have first use of it as well.

Having begun badly, with England's opening bowlers again failing to find a consistent line and length, Atherton's decision was beginning to look as threadbare as the pitch. With Black Friday already having proved unlucky for Adam Hogg, who failed a fitness test on his sore back, England were following suit until Fraser, operating from his favourite Pavilion End, took the important wickets of Brian Lara, Carl Hooper, and Sherwin Campbell.

Following Caddick's first post-lunch over, savaged for 19 runs by a combination of stunning Lara shots and help from himself half-volleys, Fraser probing length found the edge of Campbell's bat. As he had done earlier with Stuart Williams, Thorpe neatly took the catch low down at first slip.

At that stage, with the score 93 for 2, Atherton's decision to field first was looking distinctly unwise. However, the complexion of a Test match has

a habit of turning on its head when the key players are removed, which is what happened when England dismissed Hooper and Lara in the space of four overs.

Inevitably it was Fraser again, who this time was fortunate that Mark Butcher, playing instead of his injured Surrey team-mate Hollis, was on the cusp of a one-handed catch at cover as Hooper, too doubt him with confidence after his Test-winning knock four days ago, drove at a wide one.

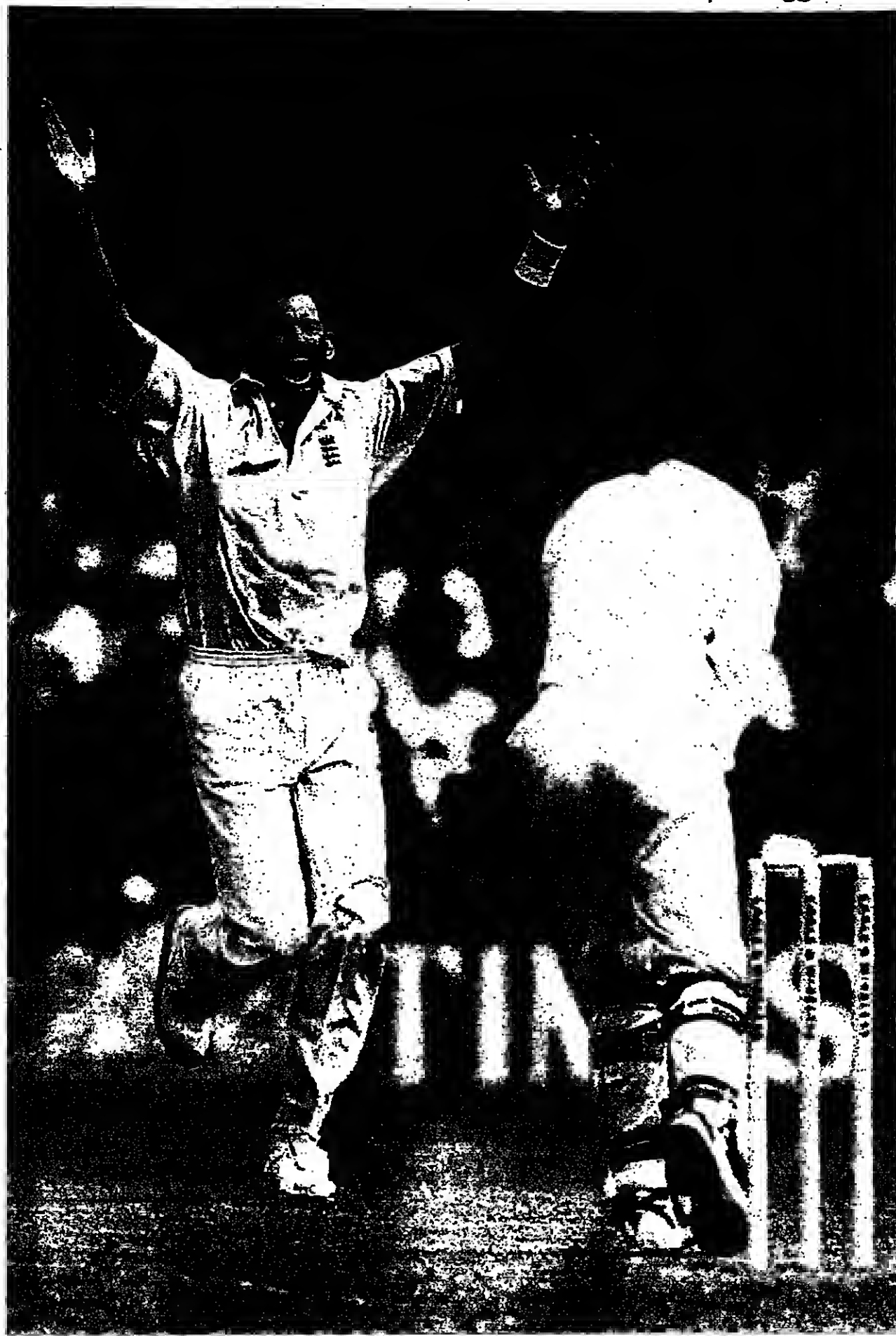
But if that was reward enough, the jewel in the crown followed an over later. Lara may have never scored a Test century on his home ground here in Port of Spain, but this time the portents were looking ominous. Having played quite beautifully, he then aimed an ambitious pull at Fraser. It took the bottom edge on its way to Jack Russell, who took a tumbling catch.

With Lara standing his ground, and questioning whether or not the ball had carried to Russell, the catch was referred to the third umpire. After watching TV replay, and much to the jubilation of England's fielders, Lara was given out and for the third time in the series that Fraser had dismissed the West Indies captain.

Fraser brings out the worst in Lara and there is an animosity between the pair that stems from the West Indies tour of England two years ago. Then the pair were involved in a slanging match on the pitch during the final two Tests, an episode that continued when Lara refused to shake the bowler's hand at the end of the series.

At Test level, bowling first is a fairly risky ploy when your bowler is confident and firing, let alone when they are feeling their way back after having the finger of accusation pointed at them.

Neither Andy Caddick nor Dean Headley give the impression that they are hewn from granite and asking them



England's Andy Caddick celebrates the wicket of West Indies opener Sherwin Campbell yesterday

Photograph: Reuters

to rip the heart of the West Indies batting out on a pitch that is slower and with far less grass than its predecessor - upon which Atherton chose to bat - was a leap of faith that many would have considered too far.

The opening salvo, which was fairly innocuous bore this out, and neither Sherwin Campbell nor Stuart Williams, who is something of a technical horror story, were troubled. With Phil Tufnell coming on as soon as the 11th over, it was

clear that Atherton was clutching at straws and England were destined for a long hot day chasing leather.

However, when Caddick switched to the Northern End, Williams' shortcomings in the technical department caught up with him. He pushed loosely at the first ball of the tall bowler's second spell and edged a catch low down to the reliable Graham Thorpe at first slip.

If the breakthrough brought a smile of relief to

Atherton's face, the sight of Lara belting Caddick's first ball to him back past the bowler for four, would have brought the furrowed brow - a constant feature of the first hour - back with a vengeance.

With a puzzle like Caddick to contend with, it is a wonder that Atherton hasn't deep lines etched all over his youthful countenance. As a bowler with height, pace and outswing, Caddick has it all. And yet, despite this skill and firepower, which potentially far outweighs

what Angus Fraser operates with, he appears to have a startlingly delicate disposition when called upon to put his talents on the line.

At this level of cricket, confidence is everything and while Caddick appears to be unable to retain the stuff, Fraser, from his 11 wickets on the neighbouring pitch, was fortunately still oozing it, albeit in that careworn way of his as West Indies went about repairing the early damage he had caused.

More reports, page 22

Chelsea claim Gullit wanted £3.3m a year

Football

By Glenn Moore

RUUD GULLIT yesterday denied that money was at the root of his departure from Chelsea and insisted "They are using that as a stick to hit me with. I want to know the real reason."

However, Gullit's version of his sacking was promptly questioned by Colin Hutchinson, the club's managing director, who described Gullit as being "crafty" by saying he wanted £2m a year to stay, and that what he actually wanted was £3.3m a year. Hutchinson added that had Gullit been prepared to negotiate a new contract earlier he would still be their manager.

Another dramatic day for the club began with a packed press conference in west London in which Gullit gave his version of recent events. He claimed Chelsea had refused to negotiate over his proposed new contract but had instead conducted transfer dealings behind his back with the apparent connivance of senior players including his replacement, Gianluca Vialli.

Gullit admitted that he had asked for a salary of £2m a year, just as he had when approached to join the club as a player, but had expected to agree a lesser figure after negotiation as had happened in 1995.

However, a few hours later Hutchinson took issue with some of Gullit's claims. "He has said in the press conference today, and he said to me yesterday, 'You didn't make an offer'. I disagree with that and I repeated the offer to him yesterday in our meeting, just before it was aborted."

"I said to him, 'Well Ruud, if you misunderstood, the figure was £1m per year gross. Would you have accepted that?'"

And he flatly said no. Ruud, who is a master of the media, very craftily said today that he asked for £2m. He did ask for £2m and I immediately responded and said, 'Gross?' And he said, 'No, netto. I always talk netto.'

"£2m netto is a far bigger commitment to the club than

£2m gross. For Ruud to receive £2m a year in his hand means that the club has got to pay tax on it. As far as we're concerned he was asking for £3,220,000 per year. But it gets worse than that because the club has to pay earnings related contributions on that. With his basic salary, and the rest, we were looking at a commitment of £3,365,000 a year to keep Ruud and quite honestly we couldn't afford it."

"I explained to him that the gap was too wide for further meaningful negotiations and said that because of the timescale we would have to start looking at alternatives."

Gullit admitted that when Hutchinson said last week that the club would look for a new manager he thought they were "bluffing".

After Vialli's appointment was announced on Thursday Gullit sought a meeting with the club chairman, Ken Bates, which was granted at 6.30pm, three hours later. After 20 minutes discussion during which Bates, said Gullit, passed responsibility to Hutchinson who had himself passed the buck to "the board" Bates "handed me a letter saying I am sacked".

Gullit also said his relationship with Bates was restricted to match days, and that he had discovered his fate from Teletext.

Instead he was told, on Thursday, that the board had decided to find another manager. Within hours he discovered that was Vialli who, he claimed, had met with Rangers' Brian Laudrup, a Chelsea transfer target, at a secret meeting on Wednesday also attended by Colin Hutchinson, Chelsea's chief executive, and Gianfranco Zola. Laudrup, he said, had been told Gullit was too busy to attend.

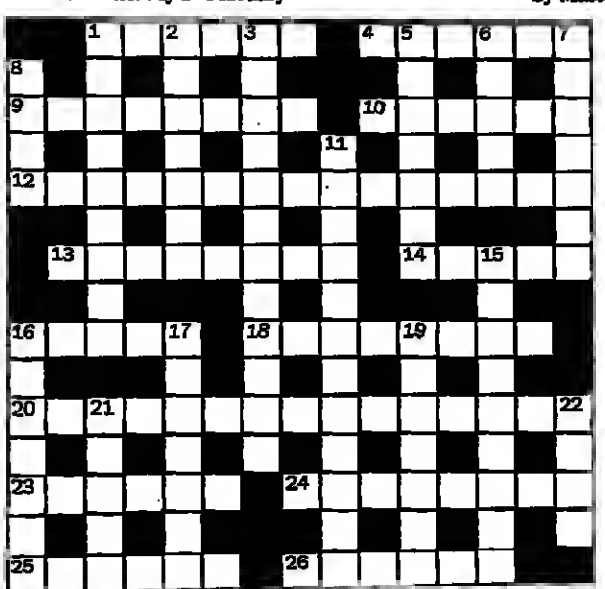
Gullit added that he "did not have a clue" what he was going to do next. He said he did not want to go anywhere solely as a player but would like to continue playing. This would ostensibly rule out both Italy's Serie A, where player-managers are banned, and the Dutch national job.

Chelsea in turmoil, page 26

THE INDEPENDENT CROSSWORD

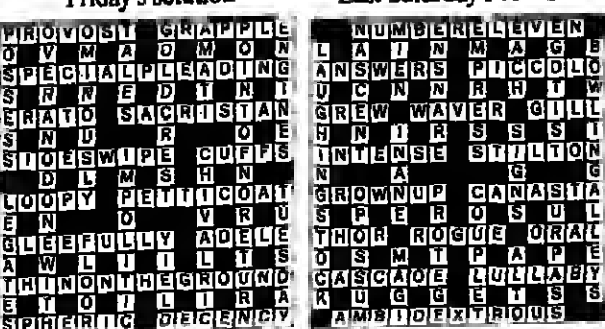
No. 3534, Saturday 14 February

By Mass



Friday's solution

Last Saturday's solution



ACROSS

- 1 Sister's place is progressing? (6)
- 4 Cut extra order, becoming sickly (6)
- 9 Ringing sound from metal units collapsing (8)
- 10 Leave city in temper (6)
- 12 Its constituents may turn out hard-hearted (3,2,10)
- 13 European is engaged in state dispute (8)
- 14 Girl's packing trendy coat (5)
- 16 Support from one in voice (5)
- 18 One driving to right's bunkered in wet (8)
- 20 Not in the manner of a will (15)
- 23 Party muddle with a missing piece of cake (6)
- 24 Energy oozed in shifting mullion: it's flat on the floor (8)
- 25 Note the make for repair (6)
- 26 Bird? Seal, from the sound (6)

DOWN

- 1 It could be diagnosed as scurvy (9)
- 2 The Parisian's following suggestion for a flutter (7)
- 3 Right good human I'd found elegant in manner (5,7)
- 5 Correspond, in a flap (7)
- 6 Boy's final report (5)
- 7 Sediment might prove it's dope (7)
- 8 Only half obdurate in the end (4)
- 11 Characteristic of the odd fish (12)
- 15 Brash, drinking five on the rocks (9)
- 16 Small beneath heel (7)
- 17 Homesteader left dog outside (7)
- 19 Dilapidated, according to the survey (3-4)
- 21 River Test's abandoned trade etc (5)
- 22 Blossom turning up on Southern plants (4)

The first five correct solutions to this week's puzzle opened next Thursday receive handwritten copies of... Answers and winners' names will be published next Saturday. Send solutions to Saturday Crossword, 2 D. Box 4015, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 3BH. Please use the best number and postcode and give your own postcode. Last week's winners: S. Moore, Norwich; D. McCrick, Weymouth; R. Fell, Mersynid; E. Precious, Holnbridge; A. Donovan, Baywards Heath.

QUEEN'S PARK OVAL SCOREBOARD

First day, England won toss

WEST INDIES - First Innings	28
S L Campbell c Thorpe b Fraser	28
S O Williams c Thorpe b Caddick	28
* C L Lara c Russell b Fraser	42
C L Hooper c Butcher b Fraser	18
S Canderpaul not out	18
J C Adams not out	18
Extras (nbs)	10
Total (for 4, 55 overs)	127
Fall: 1-28, 2-33, 3-35, 4-100	
To last: 10 Williams, C E L Ambrose, N A M McLean, K G B Benjamin, C A Walsh	

ENGLAND: * M A Atherton, A J Stewart, G P Thorpe, N Hussain, J P Crawley, M A Butcher, I R C Russell, A R Caddick, D W Headley, A R C Fraser, P C R Turner

Umpires: E Nichols (W) and D B Hair (Aus)

ON MONDAY

A night at the Dubai races with Sheikh Mohammed: the most powerful figure in British racing talks to John Roberts

TODAY

Thirteen pages of sport begin on page 16

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Saturday 14 February 1998

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YOUR MONEY

PERSONAL FINANCE

Saturday 14 February 1998

هكذا من الأصل



Come home to a real fire: British insurers are paying £1m a day for arson claims. The true cost, including interruption to work, can be twice as high; not to mention lives lost and serious injuries

Photograph: Ron Sanford/Tony Stone Images

Your plans may go up in smoke, too...

Whether it's kids torching a stolen car, jilted lovers out for revenge or simple insurance fraud, arson is a growing problem. By Paul Slade

Newcastle's West End – three-and-a-half square miles of terraced houses, back lanes and brickyards – is the arson capital of Europe. Eight out of 10 fires put out by the local brigade have been started deliberately.

Detective Martyn Campbell, part of the area's arson task force, says: "The UK has the highest rate of arson in Europe and the West End of Newcastle has the highest rate in the UK. There's a very high unemployment rate, a lot of run-down estates, and very few private houses."

The local fire brigade reports about 600 malicious fires in the area each year – about two a day. For them, arson accounts for 83 per cent of call-outs, against 50 per cent for the UK as a whole.

Detective Campbell says: "We've arrested drug gangs who've petrol-bombed one another's property, we've had jilted boyfriends setting fire to the new boyfriend's car. We've had a mother with a young daughter who had petrol poured through their let-

ter box and ignited at four o'clock in the morning.

"You can pick up a three-bedroom flat for £1,500 in this area, so there's a real incentive for landlords in negative equity to set fire to the premises for the insurance money. We've had a couple of those. But the majority are 10- to 16-year-olds getting into empty premises and setting fire to them."

Newcastle's problems may be unique, but arson is a growing problem throughout the UK. Home Office figures record 90,500 malicious fires in 1996, a jump of 7 per cent on the previous year. This total includes 37,500 buildings deliberately set alight – about one in three of all the building fires reported – and 45,000 cars and other vehicles – just over half of all road vehicle fires. In 1996, 136 people died as a result of arson and another 3,284 were seriously injured.

British insurers currently pay out arson claims at the rate of £1m a day.

What can you do?

Insurers do not add a sum to your premiums specifically to cover arson, but lump the risk in with all other damage, which means you pay for other people's crimes.

Tony Baker of the industry's Arson Prevention Bureau says the best thing worried policyholders can do to guard against the risk is improve the general security of their home. This means maintaining external fences, fitting approved door and window locks and considering security lighting outside. "Most people are really surprised when you tell them the extent of arson and the cost in lives and injuries," he says.

"But, once you are alerted to it, there are basic things you can do. Keep gaps under doors as narrow as possible to stop lit paper being pushed under them. If you've got a letterbox, put a metal container on the inside to contain any fire from lit paper pushed through the box."

Tony Baker, of the industry's Arson Prevention Bureau, says that adding in the incidental costs involved, such as interruption to work, brings the total cost closer to twice that.

As far as insurers are concerned, arson claims are treated like any other fire claims – unless they believe the

owner of the house or car involved set the fire. All fires which cause damage worth more than a couple of thousand pounds will trigger a visit from a specialist loss adjuster, who will give his view on how the fire started.

If there are reasons for suspicion, a private forensic lab will be called in. About one in five arson fires turn out to have been set by the owner as an attempt at insurance fraud.

Often, the clue lies less in the fire damage itself than in what was lost. Cornhill deputy claims manager Harry Rule says: "If you look at the statistics of vehicles stolen, it's this year's and last year's that top the league. It tails off as you go back through six, seven, eight-year-old vehicles."

"And then you find that nine- and 10-year-old vehicles are stolen more often and invariably found burnt out. I'm afraid you do get the rather curious idea in your head that here is a policyholder whose car has reached the end of the road."

Joyriding is another common cause of car fires. Mr Baker says: "What does a bored 10- to 14-year-old do of an evening when they want to have bit of fun? They pinch a car, race it around, and set it on fire. There are people who like to watch fires, and setting fire to a vehicle is just fun to them."

On the commercial side, insurers often find that warehouse fires involve the loss of stock which is no longer fashionable, or cannot be sold for some other reason. This might mean, for example, a January fire which happens to dispose of a huge pile of last year's calendars.

Domestic arson too, is often easy to detect. Neil Kelly of loss adjusters Crawford THG says: "You do get the professional touch, but you also get some fairly inept things. People get caught out when they want the fire to spread. They lay a trail of combustible material where they want the fire to run along. We open up the premises later and, lo and behold, it's still there."

The hope of a hefty insurance payout is not the driving force for all arsonists who set fire to their own homes. One 19-year-old man made such a mess of the DIY work on his flat that he persuaded a friend to help him set fire to the place so the council would rehouse him. In fact, the council rehoused both of them – behind bars.

INSIDE

3/JOHN WINDSOR
Rock 'n' Roll
swindle?
5/JONATHAN DAVES
Go easy on
stocks
7/ANDREW VERITY
Death of the
MIG
9/JULIE OXBOROUGH
Going for
growth

In the July Budget, the Chancellor announced that tax exempt savings schemes will change in April 1999. As a result you may not be able to continue to enjoy the current tax benefits offered by a PEP. However, the Government has announced that a new tax privileged vehicle is to be introduced – the Individual Savings Account, or ISA for short. Full details have yet to be confirmed and we are currently in discussion with the Government as to the future implications for PEPs. The value to you of the tax benefits will depend on your own circumstances. Past performance is not necessarily a guide to future performance. The price of investments and the income from them can go down as well as up, you may not get back as much as you invest. M&G do not offer investment advice or make any recommendations regarding investments – we only promote the packaged products and services of the M&G marketing group. There is a 0.5% difference between the buying and selling prices. Issued by M&G Financial Services Limited (Regulated by The Personal Investment Authority). Registered Office: M&G House, Victoria Road, Chelmsford CM1 1FB. M&G Unit Trusts are managed by M&G Securities Limited (Regulated by IMRO and The Personal Investment Authority).

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Space invasion



NIC
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PERSONAL FINANCE JOURNALIST OF THE YEAR

THIS column begins in a most unusual style - with an apology. The growing success (literally) of the Your Money section, in advertising terms, coupled with technical problems at our end, have meant that it has not been possible to contain all our regular constituent parts in one part of the newspaper.

You will therefore find our motoring page in the Time Off section of today's paper. Property is at the back of the main section. At the same time, a temporary lack of space means we have held over for one week the Internet Investor column from Robin Amlot. We have also given a one-week break to John Andrew, our Stockmarket Made Simple writer, although he resurfaces today as our Valentine's Day columnist. See what you think.

Apologies over, now to the meaty stuff. Among the many hundreds of letters and faxes that crossed my desk this week was one from Virgin Direct. The company mirrors its boss, Richard Branson, in its endless quest for publicity. But not all Virgin's attempts at headline-grabbing are pointless stunts.

This week's PR effort involves a proposal from Mr Branson, which he hopes will be backed by a number of other institutions, for a "kitemark" system for financial products.

Included in Virgin's sights are the hopelessly complicated charging structures used by many companies on their products, including pensions. This is a difficult area for me. On the one hand, having sat in this chair for a year or two, I can generally understand the way charges work.

even the more complex ones.

It is also true that complexity need not necessarily mean poor value - I find Equitable Life's pensions are not, for example, as understandable as some, but there is no denying they are among the most competitive.

Yet one of the common bugbears of many readers, as our postbag attests, is that they simply can't work out what companies are taking out of their pensions in fees and charges. So, yes, simplification is necessary - and the idea of an independent assessment panel to award the kitemark also appeals.

But I still have a problem. What if a company decides that it will charge people who pay £100 a month into a personal pension less than those who pay in £50? What if the charging structures were tiered even further - as some are? Would Mr "kitemark" Branson see this as "good value" or "unnecessary complication"?

And would some companies be denied a kitemark if, despite their excellent value, the nature of the market they address (self-invested pensions) meant their products were more complex than normal?

The verdict on this Virgin stunt must be - not bad, Richard. But you've still got some way to go to make it workable.

Finally, a plug. My colleague Steve Lodge, editor of *The Independent on Sunday* personal finance section, has written an excellent "Guide to Making Your Investments Work for You". It is sponsored by Wesleyan Financial Services and is available by calling 0800 1379749. Or fill in the coupon on page 12.

As PEPs go out and ISAs come in, Iain Morse looks at an alternative tax haven for investors' cash

Nothing ventured...

YOU ARE likely to be hearing a lot more about Venture Capital Trusts (VCTs) over the next few months. VCTs are investment funds which take equity in companies worth £10m or less. Conceived as a replacement to Business Expansion Schemes (BES), they carry generous tax incentives.

BESs were intended to help small and risky ventures raise money, not from banks but by share subscription from private investors. Instead, most were set up to invest into rentable property, including campus accommodation for students.

The regulation of VCTs reflects the lesson learned from the failure of BESs to help high risk, hi-tech enterprises find investment backing. The risk should not be underestimated: as from June last year, VCTs cannot be "asset backed" or "protected". This makes any VCT investment risky.

In return, you can put as much as £100,000 in a year into one or more funds, and can benefit from four tax breaks, two on income and two on capital gains. All dividend income from VCT shares is tax free. If buying into a new issue, you can claim back 20 per cent income tax at the lower rate of the amount you invest.

All capital gains on VCT shares are also tax exempt, but more than this, you can roll over any liability for capital gains tax (CGT) on shares just sold by re-investing the gain into a VCT. Moores Marr Bradley (MMB), a firm of independent financial advisers specialising in helping accountants shelter their clients' money from tax, offers the following example of VCTs' tax generosity. Suppose you are a high-rate taxpayer, selling shares which originally cost £100,000 for £206,500. After deducting the original cost, plus an indexation allowance of, say, £10,000, and the annual CGT exemption of £6,500, there would still be a chargeable gain of £90,000, on which the assumed liability would be £36,000.

By investing the whole gain of £90,000 into a VCT, any capital gains liability is deferred until the VCT is sold.

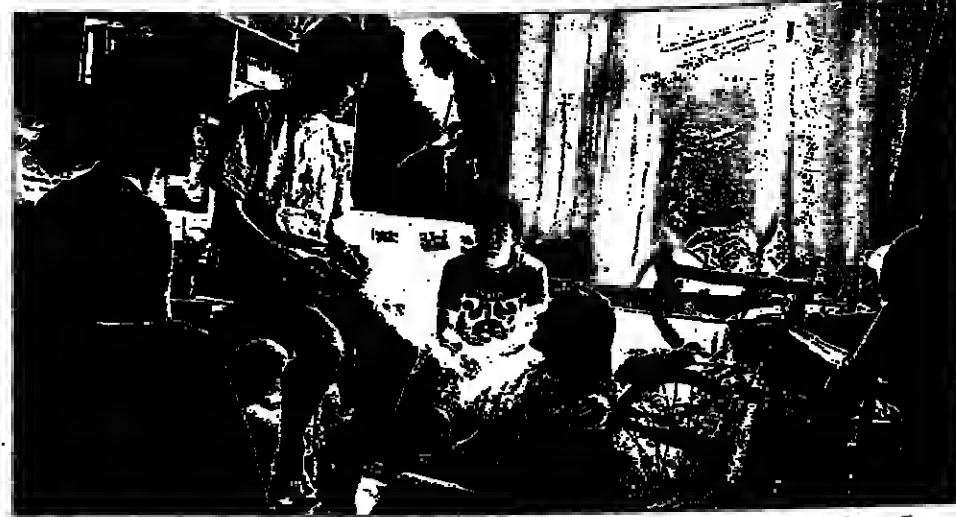
Claiming the 20 per cent income-tax rebate, you have already made £18,000, adding this to your existing share portfolio. You have already sheltered £36,000 from the tax man and, in theory, you have turned £90,000 into £108,000.

The catch is that to qualify for two of these tax breaks - the 20 per cent rebate and CGT roll over - you must hold the VCT shares for at least five years. This would not be much of a catch except for the inherently risky nature of VCT investment.

Gareth Marr, managing director at MMB, says: "VCTs may not be suitable for everyone. The job of any adviser is

to look very carefully at the client's needs to determine whether this investment fits. If it does not, you have to be prepared to advise against a VCT, no matter how attractive the tax incentive. If it does fit, you also have to be prepared to research the market extremely carefully to find the right VCT."

Martin Churchill, director of research at stockbroker Allenbridge, adds: "Comparing VCTs to say PEPs is like putting together chalk and cheese. When you buy into a VCT you are lending your money to a team who may only be investing into 15 or 20 small companies, appointing and removing board members, seeing management accounts on a monthly basis."



Risky ventures: instead BESs were set up to invest in property, including student digs

By comparison to traditional fund management, this is hands-on stuff, with annual investment into any one company by the VCT limited to not more than £1m, and the average running at £733,000. It also calls for particular skills on the part of those running the VCT.

Allenbridge specialise in analysing VCT performance, and Mr Churchill warns: "If you are thinking about investing into one, look closely at the management's track record on deal making. The key factors are that they be consistent, used to doing deals of the right size and frequency, and spread the exposure of investors' funds across both companies and business sectors."

Because VCTs are intended to provide start-up capital, they are not allowed to invest into shares which can be traded on main stock markets. The only exception to this is shares traded on the Alternative Investment Market (AIM), itself set up to provide a market for shares in small firms.

This means that VCT funds may have difficulty finding buyers for shares they hold. At present, there are only some 12,000 VCT holders, by comparison with about 3.5 million PEP owners. Total funds under management have a value of £370m, with new issues this year looking to top this up by at least £150m. This is a lot of new money to flow into a

limited market, potentially forcing up the price of good deals. Past performance might serve as a guide, but for the fact that most existing funds first issued shares in 1997. Although VCT share prices are quoted and tradable, there is no incentive to sell within the five-year term.

For those still tempted, Close Brothers is looking to raise £10m for a fund investing only into AIM-listed shares. The company already manages some £62.8m of VCT funds. Murray Johnstone, also runs existing funds of around £55m, and are looking to raise a further £40m for a general VCT. Size isn't everything, but it implies diversification of risk. Murray Johnstone's existing VCT funds are invested across 12 industry sectors, with average exposure per sector of less than 10 per cent of total fund value.

This new generation of VCTs is packaged to look much like other retail financial products. Don't be deceived. These are not replacement PEPs, but investments of a riskier nature. Invest only what you can afford to lose.

Allenbridge is offering readers of *The Independent* a free guide to VCTs. Call 0171-409 1111. Moores Marr Bradley offers a short pamphlet on the same subject. Fax the company on 01908 690369 to receive a copy.

SPOTLIGHT ON: M&G'S INDEX-TRACKER PEP

The product: M&G's Index Tracker personal equity plan (PEP).

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If used within a PEP, the fund comes with "ISA-ability". This means it can switch without penalty into another vehicle which will replace the PEP in April 1999, the Individual Savings Account (ISA).

Taking up this investment will cost little. There is no initial charge, which elsewhere can come to 3 per cent of the investment. There are also no exit fees, which punish investors for needing their money sooner than they thought they would. There is only a

0.75 per cent annual management fee. This is less, for example, than Virgin's tracker PEP.

Drawbacks and risks: This is an unusual departure for M&G, which has no experience of running tracker funds. But it's a "value-driven" approach has been troubled by poor performance until very recently.

It has farmed out the day-to-day management to State Street Global Advisors, which does manage over \$140bn of tracker fund money.

Annual management charges could be cheaper. Legal & General charges just 0.5 per cent a year. Buy L&G's identical tracker through a discount broker and you could even end up being paid £60 to set one up.

But the main worry is the "Duke of York" objection to all trackers: when they're up, they're up, and when they're down, they're down. They have no way of mitigating the downside if the market slumps.

Graham Bates, of Leeds-based

financial adviser Bates & Partners, criticises M&G for promoting the product to first-time, "unsophisticated" investors. "It's all very well looking at how much a tracker can rise. But you will also get the full whack of any losses."

Verdict: As long as there are cheaper trackers around, why bother with this one?

Marks out of five: Two and a half - because unlike some other trackers, there are no exit fees.

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COLLECT TO INVEST: JOHN WINDSOR

Never mind the critics, this is art

Until recently, due to the cultivated brainlessness of Messrs Rotten, Vicious *et al*, Seventies punk was dismissed as a perverted style movement that sprang from rotten pop music. Today, art historians are beginning to appreciate the cunning of its visual imagery and to understand its roots in the Situationist art of the Sixties.

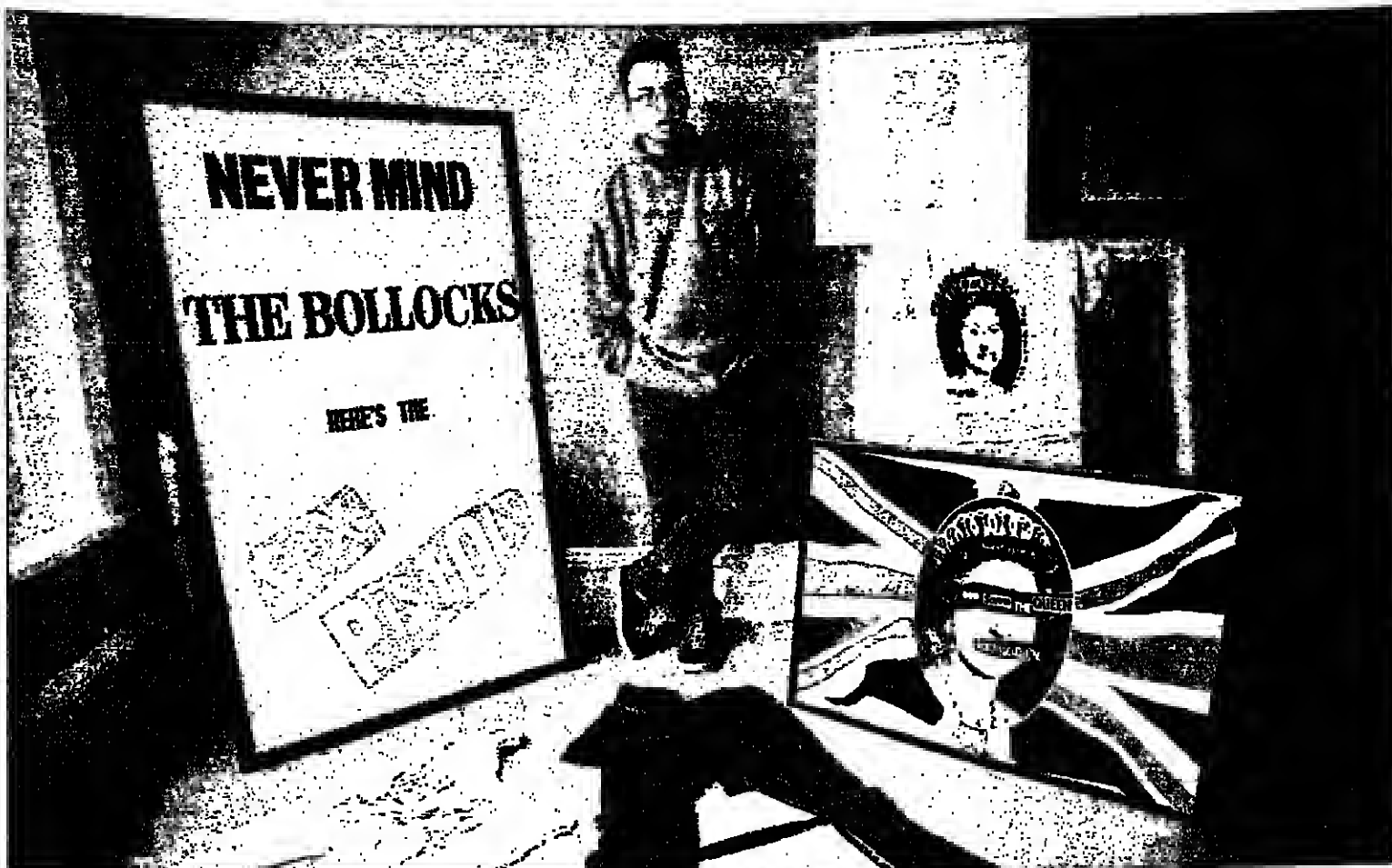
The first exhibition of "punk art", "I Groaned With Pain", was at the Eagle Gallery in Farringdon, east London in December 1995. It framed as fine art Sex Pistols posters and T-shirts showing bare breasts and homosexual cowboys exposing themselves. Now, an exhibition "Destroy: Punk Graphic Design in Britain" (mainly record sleeves) is at the Royal Festival Hall until 16 March. And Jamie Reid, the artist responsible for the Pistols' cut-and-paste poster graphics, has had a retrospective in New York that will tour Japan and Australia before showing in London later this year.

In the salerooms, a steady market in Sex Pistols ephemera has developed. Prices would take off if only auctioneers would take the trouble to verify authenticity. Meanwhile, under £500 will buy a Sex Pistols poster or a T-shirt or two.

The Pistols' spitting and vomiting and the DIY tackiness of their graphics had an apparent spontaneity. But that was deceptive. In fact, the entire punk media-package was meticulously contrived by the Pistols' Svengali-like controllers, the impresario Malcolm McLaren and fashion designer Vivienne Westwood, who had an avant-garde fashion shop on the King's Road.

Their role as promoters is well known. The roots of punk in art less so. McLaren, who attended Croydon College of Art and Goldsmiths College, insists: "It was always an art thing. We were dealing in images". He and Westwood concocted a cocktail of pornographic, fetishistic and anti-Royal images calculated to stir up trouble during the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977.

In the late Sixties, McLaren and Reid had been contemporaries at Croydon College of Art. They sat late into the night discussing the Paris Situationists' critique of loneliness and aimlessness as the bogies that had superseded the struggle for material survival, as well as their use of street theatre to criticise consumer society. Reid designed Christopher Gray's



Punk art: Paul Stolper, a London dealer in contemporary art, has one of the finest collections

Photograph: Philip Meech

book *Leaving the 20th Century*, an anthology of Situationist writing that became McLaren's bible. Punk nihilism is essentially Situationist. So is taking art out of the galleries and onto the streets. Later, McLaren head-hunted Reid to design posters with cut-out typography - punk's hallmark.

The various, apparently disparate, images of punk graphics seem more coherent when viewed in a Situationist context. The bondage fetishism is not only sexual but social. What a deeper understanding of punk means in art market terms is that it confers upon the gravitas of an art-historical movement. Once the art-buying intelligentsia realises that a full appreciation of it can be gained not just from back numbers of *The Sun*, but from scholarly essays such as George Robertson's "The Situationist International: Its Penetration Into British Culture" (*Block*, issue 14, 1988, pp 38-53), they will begin to reach for their wallets.

The forthcoming retrospective exhibition of Jamie Reid, now 51, records 30 years of his life as an artist, including videos and photographs. He has issued a signed limited-edition silk-screen version of his Pistols artwork. Good publicity for the originals.

I tracked him down to The Strongroom recording studios in Curtain Road, east London, where he is resident artist and working with a group of musicians called the Afro-Celt Sound System. He has embraced Druidism and Celtic culture.

How does he look back on his *Never Mind the Bollocks* posters? "I still think they are very valid and powerful images". When McLaren recruited him he was a printer-designer at the anarchist Suburban Press in south London, where he was already using ransom-note lettering ("we couldn't afford Letraset") on cheap pamphlets for groups campaigning for the rights of women, ethnic minorities, squatters

and social security claimants. He says: "As a printer, you develop a sixth sense that certain things will look good. Ripped-out lettering, for example, looks very graphic and direct".

And when the first wave of punk was over? "Bollocks to the Poll Tax" T-shirts. They were his. He also supplied graphics for the campaign against the Criminal Justice Bill - and the campaign to legalise cannabis. So start collecting.

The finest collection of punk gear, predominantly the Sex Pistols', has been accumulated over 10 years by Paul Stolper, a London dealer in contemporary art, and Andrew Wilson, assistant editor of *Art Monthly*. It was their collection that was shown at the Eagle Gallery. Wilson's critique of the origins of punk in the catalogue - itself a collector's piece - is an art-historical milestone.

Stolper, 32, says: "We don't collect punk items for nostalgia - I wouldn't give a fig for Johnny Rotten's signa-

ture". Wilson says: "We go for the visual image. That's what counts, rather than the music. Reid's 'God Save the Queen' poster looks simple but it is a *tour de force* of printing. He used pink and yellow, colours that don't sit together and that are fugitive - they fade".

Only they and a handful of collectors who worked at Westwood's shop know how to recognise genuine McLaren/Westwood garments by their labels. At a Bonhams auction of rock, pop and guitars last May, seven lots of punk T-shirts and bondage gear failed to sell because aficionados doubted their authenticity. A published guide to labels would send prices rocketing. But those in the know are keeping mum. Never mind; at the same sale, Pistols posters were selling for between £80 for "Never Mind the Bollocks" to £180 for "God Save the Queen". Buy now. It's your turn to make cash out of chaos.

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The currency of love

On St Valentine's Day, John Andrew takes a break from his regular stock market column in this section to look at the value of old tokens of affection.

THERE are some strange notions about the force of money. Take Liza Minnelli's tongue-in-cheek hit song from the film *Cabaret*, *Money makes the world go round*. Gilbert and Sullivan had a different view in *Iolanthe*, claiming that it really is love that makes the world go round. Spend-thrifts occasionally attempt to justify their expenditure by remarking: "Coins are round so they go round".

Scientists dismiss claims that it is either love or money that makes the world spin on its axis. Similarly, economists are unanimous that a currency's velocity of circulation has nothing to do with the shape of coins.

Having rejected any link between currency and motion, it is interesting to explore if there is any connection between coins and love. Old records reveal that there is indeed such an association.

According to *Addy's Folk Tales and Superstitions*, published in 1893, Derbyshire girls on All-Hallows Day placed a sprig of rosemary and a crooked shpence under their pillows so that they might dream of their future husbands.

Our ancestors seemed to have an obsession with crooked or bent coins. Take the crooked man who walked a crooked mile and eventually found a crooked shpence. Why had the coin been vandalised?

It is most likely to have been dropped by a courting couple, for it was the custom up until the early 18th century for lovers to exchange bent coins. It is unlikely they believed that a crooked coin assumed amuletic properties, but by bending it the "love token" could easily be identified and therefore not accidentally spent.

The earliest mention of a "collection" of coins in Britain refers to bent or "bowed" pieces. The 1512 Will of Sir Edward Howard reads: "I bequeath him my rope of bowed nobles - containing 300 angels". Nobles or angels were gold coins which circulated for a third of a pound. Although we know nothing of Sir Edward's exploits, it is safe to conclude that he was not a coin collector.

One of the quaintest references to coins and love is found in the *Tales* for 11 November 1710. An essay entitled *The Adventures of a Shilling*

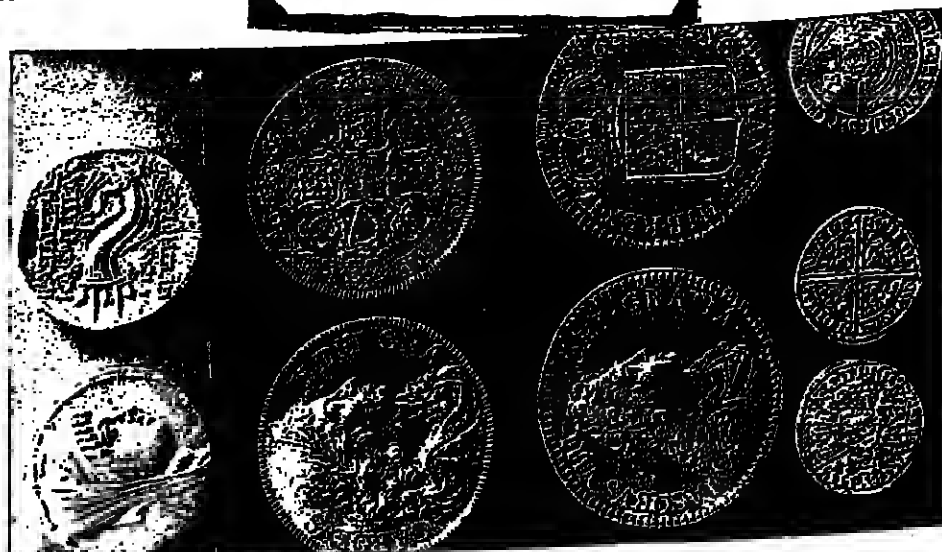
traces the birth of a talking ingot from a silver mine in Peru to its reincarnation as a Queen Anne shilling. It then follows its life as a coin of the realm.

At one point the animated shilling tells of a Recruiting Sergeant, who "sacrificed me to his pleasures and made use of me to seduce a milk-maid. The wench bent me and gave me to her sweetheart applying more properly than she intended the usual form of, 'To my love and from my love'."

With the mechanisation of the coining process, thicker coins were produced and bending money for love tokens was no longer practical.

Thousands of bent old coins have survived the years, forgotten memories of previous loves. Although interesting, collectors seek coins which have not been bent and such love tokens are of no commercial value.

However, there is a demand for



Tokens of love: but only if they're bent

Photograph: Hulton Deutsch

the monetary love tokens that followed the bending craze. Worn coins of the period 1760-1800, were frequently engraved with names, monograms and typical symbolism of love such as a knot or Cupid's arrow.

Most of those which have survived are the work of early 19th century hands. For example, there is a flat disc, previously an 18th cen-

tury copper coin, which is inscribed on the obverse, "Peter Hart aged 23, Transported for seven years, August 1833", while the reverse bears these heart-breaking lines:

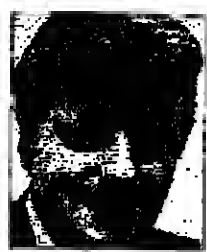
"When this you see Remember me And bear me in your mind Let all the world say what they will Don't prove to me unkind"

Daniel Fearon of Bonhams Coin

Department advises that an average 18th century copper coin engraved with a love theme is worth about £25, while outstanding examples will sell for £65 or more.

However, any specimen with a love and transportation theme could be worth up to £1,000 as these are keenly sought in Australia. The more heart rending the verse, the higher the price.

Don't go overboard on equities



THE JONATHAN DAVIS COLUMN

It is a brave man who is prepared to stick his head above the parapet and try to predict the future course of market returns. For anyone trying to do some serious long-term investment planning, however, the exercise must be undertaken. The most important criterion to adopt is to make sure that the assumptions you make are: (i) consistent with each other; and (ii) based on realism.

I make no excuse, therefore, for returning to the Barclays Capital gilt-equity study mentioned last week. As with equities generally, which reward those who take the risk of owning them with handsome returns over time, the author of the Barclays study, its markets and strategy expert Michael Hughes, is well paid for sticking his neck out and predicting how the next 10 years might turn out.

So I make no apology for putting Michael's neck on the block again in public. A year ago he correctly made the point that while the stock market looked overvalued on all conventional valuation models, that in itself was no reason to believe that it would not continue to do well at least for a time.

At the time, he was criticised in some quarters for his bullish view, partly on the grounds that as he worked for a broking firm (BZW), he would be bullish about equities, wouldn't he? Fair enough, I suppose, but as we now know, it turned out to be an excellent call, with 1997 another starring year for both shares

and gilts. This year, with Barclays having sold BZW, at least the accusation that Michael might be talking the book of his equity salesmen is one that can no longer be reasonably held against him!

Yet, as I indicated last week, he is still fundamentally optimistic. He believes, as do I, that gilts will continue to become relatively more attractive as an investment class: their real return vis-à-vis equities will continue. He sees yields on gilts reverting to something closer to their level before the great inflation horrors of the 1970s (5-6 per cent), and the yield ratio (the yield on gilts as a multiple of the yield on shares) falling from its current level (around 2.0) to 1.5 or less.

He projects gilts producing a total return of 8.5 per cent a year over the next 10 years - less in nominal terms than the last two decades, but a still handsome 6.0 per cent a year in real terms. This is a powerful argument for including a higher proportion of gilts in any investor's portfolio today than would have been sensible in the past 20 years. As the table shows, it is the assumptions about equity returns which look more suspect. The dividend yield on the market at the start of this year (3.3 per cent) is lower than at the start of all the previous 10-year periods covered by the table.

History suggests that a dividend yield in this range is likely to be followed by a period of negative real returns over five years

and only a marginally positive real return over the next 10 years. Yet the Barclays Capital study suggests that equities are capable of continuing to appreciate in value by 7.0 per cent a year and generate a total return (including dividends) of 10.5 per cent a year.

That certainly looks ambitious and requires special circumstances to justify it. One obvious one is the secular decline in inflation that we have seen since the mid 1980s. In real terms, if you project inflation of 2.5 per cent a year, as Barclays does, then 10.5 per cent a year equity returns are not out of line with past experience. It equates to real capital appreciation of 4.5 per cent per annum (7.0 per cent minus 2.5 per cent) - which is actually fractionally lower than the post-war average of 4.6 per cent per annum. Another underlying assumption you need to arrive at such an outcome is that companies will continue to be able to generate and retain the much higher proportion of GDP that they have achieved so far this decade.

Michael Hughes admits that this may be optimistic, but argues that it is not impossible in the current environment of low inflation and increasing globalisation. He also has some interesting statistics about the age profile of the country. As we all know from the "pensions timebomb", the proportion of the population aged over 55 is set to reach a record level in the next 15 years. If past

precedent is any guide, this should result in a fundamental shift in the growth of savings, which in turn could provide a fundamental shift in the valuation of both gilts and equities.

Put all these forces together, and what you have, conceivably, is a set of circumstances which could justify a continued period of good performance from shares, alongside a relative return to favour by gilts. Of course, there are a lot of ifs and buts - war, inflation, deflation are all threats. So too is the possibility that there will come a political backlash against large company profitability from tax-starved governments. Michael Hughes' point is that within the constraints of the long run historical averages, valuation parameters can and do change for quite long periods of time.

We need to be alive, he argues, to the possibility that the era we are facing is a genuinely unprecedented one, in which the savings rate soars, corporate profits remain strong and inflation is restrained for another decade. "Too good to be true?" One of the defining characteristics of the top of a bull market, goes an old saying, is its ability to "draw in higher intellects". My view remains that it is more prudent to assume a less rosy outcome and hope to be pleasantly surprised rather than aim too high and be brought crashing down. The message is: stay invested in equities, but don't go overboard.

Past dividend yield & future forecasts

Past ten year intervals (%p.a.)

Ten years beginning	Dividend Yield*	Real Dividend growth rate	Inflation	Capital Appreciation of Equities	Total Equity Return	Risk premium	Total Bond Return
Dec.27	4.9	2.6	-0.5	2.6	7.8	0.9	6.7
Dec.37	4.6	-1.4	2.6	2.1	6.6	2.7	4.1
Dec.47	4.3	1.0	4.8	1.9	7.2	8.9	-1.7
Dec.57	8.3	3.7	2.8	9.5	14.7	11.1	3.6
Dec.67	4.2	2.9	11.5	5.6	11.2	3.2	8.0
Dec.77	5.4	4.2	8.0	14.9	20.8	7.9	12.9
Dec.87	4.4	3.0	4.5	10.6	15.6	3.8	11.7

* (%) for dividend yields at beginning of period

Planning forecasts 1998-2007

Dividend Yield (%) (end 97)	Real Dividend Growth	Inflation	Capital Appreciation of Equities	Total Equity Return	Risk premium	Total Bond Return
3.3	2.5	2.5	7.0	10.5	2.0	6.5

All % p.a. (other than dividend yield)

Source: Barclays Capital

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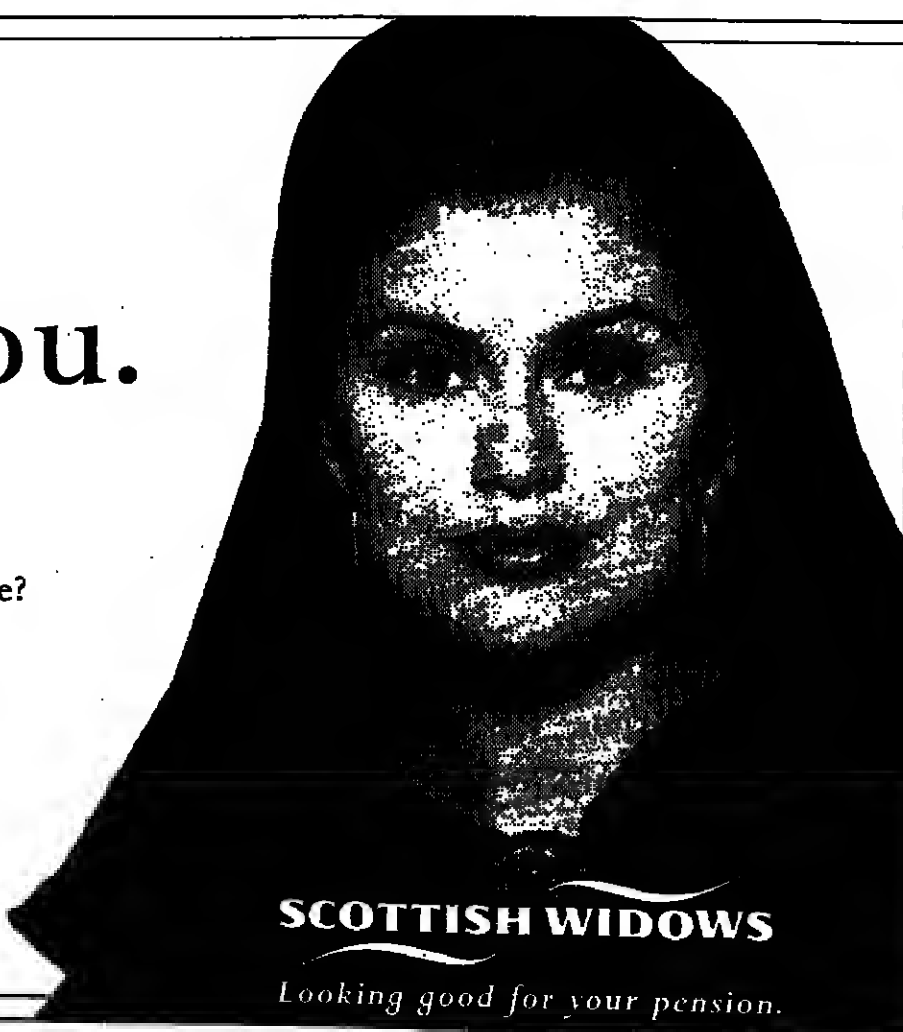
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NEW MORTGAGES with some providers will now amount to 1 per cent less than the week before – without any change in interest rates. How did this happen?

It began with an announcement from Halifax that it was abolishing charges for mortgage indemnity insurance for loans worth up to 90 per cent of the value of the house. This week, Woolwich and NatWest Mortgage Services joined in, abolishing mortgage indemnity charges for loans up to 90 per cent, while Northern Rock did so for loans up to 85 per cent.

Charges for mortgage indemnity insurance (or guarantees, also known as MIGs) are not trivial. For a 90 per cent loan on a house worth £100,000, borrowers with Halifax paid £1,020 to indemnify the mort-

The interest on this premium rolls up as long as the customer hangs on to the loan, which means a borrower with a 25-year loan would pay £8.50 a month at current interest rates. Over the life of the loan, this would amount to £2,550.

To its critics, Halifax's move was a belated response to a long-running scandal in the housing market, known to some as the "mortgage protection racket". The nub of the criticism is: who exactly is being indemnified, and against what? Does the customer truly realise what is being paid for?

Mortgage indemnity is almost exceptional in the insurance industry in that the customer is compelled on pain of not getting a mortgage to insure the lender against incurring a loss if he or she defaults. The premium, which is usually added to the mortgage, covers the risk that a slump in the housing market forces the lender to repossess and sell the house for less than the value of the loan.

Critics attack the practice on several fronts. The risk, they say, should be the company's, not the customer's. If the lender has to pass it on, it should build it into the rate it offers. Second, the lender typically takes a cut of the premium in commission for "selling it" to the borrower. When the premium is added to the loan, the lender is making interest on commission it has itself earned, for persuading the customer to protect not the customer but the lender.

Third, mortgage indemnity

Too little, too late? Some lenders have criticised the Halifax for acting on MIGs sooner

premiums rose sharply when the housing slump came in the early 1990s. But now that the housing slump has largely recovered, the premiums charged have barely come down. Moreover, lenders typically use just one insurer and do not shop around.

Fourth, a premium which was charged to indemnify the lender for the life of the loan—up to 25 years—can go to waste if someone moves, or remortgages. Another premium becomes payable on a new loan. Fifth, the premium is possibly the most expensive single premium insurance policy on the market. A premium of £1,000 on a £100,000, 90 per cent mortgage means that if the house's value falls by £20,000, the premium has only covered a risk of losing £10,000. Hardly a value for money.

But what has made most consumers angry is that they

work against the customer. The housing slump in the early 1990s meant lenders were not covered for the whole of their loss on defaulted mortgages. Insurers, concerned with their own underwriting margins, became stricter with claims. To claim successfully, lenders were forced to show they had tried their best to get the money back from the borrowers.

Departments were set up to trace borrowers, who, believing their MIG protected them against the slump, were suddenly landed, out of the blue, with bills for thousands of pounds. Thousands are still

Did customers realise what they were buying? Chris French, managing director of Kensington Mortgages, which has never charged for mortgage indemnity, said: "Before we set up in 1995, I worked for a long time for other building societies. No

one ever told me that mortgage indemnity guarantees didn't cover the customer. All the people I've known in the industry, to a man, said they weren't aware of it either. We all believed it did cover the customer. The poor old customer pays out for something and doesn't get anything back."

Cheltenham & Gloucester, together with other lenders including Mortgage Express, Direct Line, Coutts & Co, Hinkley & Rugby and Scottish Widows Bank, believe the scandal is such that Halifax's move, however honourable, is too little, too late.

C&G has, since 1994, abolished mortgage indemnity for all loans – not just those under 90 per cent of the house value. This has saved 125,000 borrowers over £400 each, or £50m. Roger Burden, C&G's managing director, said: "It has taken Halifax over three years to

follow our lead – and the move is, in reality, an attempt to restore its market share. Furthermore, Halifax is only scrapping MIGs for lower risk customers and not across the board."



Halifax retorts that C&G offers few loans over 90 per cent of the house value, where the risk to the lender is much greater. Protection is a cost to the lender which will be passed on, in higher rates if not elsewhere.

Rising housing markets have helped the decision by Halifax, Woolwich and Northern Rock. It is now much less likely they will lose money on repossession of a house. But it should be noted that most loans over 90 per cent still carry a charge for mortgage indemnity. First-time buyers should read any small-print carefully, all the more so if they are borrowing more than 90 per cent of a home's value.

Mortgage Indemnity Guarantees (MIGs)		Maximum Loan with no MIG, %
1st Choice	1.00	90
2nd Choice	1.00	90
3rd Choice	1.00	90
4th Choice	1.00	90
5th Choice	1.00	90
6th Choice	1.00	90
7th Choice	1.00	90
8th Choice	1.00	90
9th Choice	1.00	90
10th Choice	1.00	90
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Wrap up your investments

You have two tax years left before the arrival of ISAs in which you can invest in a PEP. David Prosser looks at some of the top funds

DECIDING TO take advantage of personal equity plans (PEPs) is one thing. Actually finding the best ones is another matter altogether. There's a bewildering array of plans on offer and, in the run up to the end of the tax year in April, dozens of PEP managers will launch noisy advertising campaigns in an effort to persuade you to part with your cash.

To separate the wheat from the chaff, you need to be sure that you know what you're doing. Remember, in itself a PEP is not an investment, it's merely a wrapper which you can put round other investments in order to avoid paying tax on the income and capital gains they produce.

To compare all managed PEPs in one exercise would be confusing. Different funds invest in different types

of assets. And some types of PEP are more risky than others for investors, particularly in the shorter term. So you need to decide which sectors of the market most interest you.

Among investment trusts, you have a choice of five main sectors: UK capital growth, UK income growth, UK general, UK smaller companies and continental Europe - plus a handful of more specialist overseas ones, into which a maximum of £1,500 may be invested as part of a PEP.

There are six main unit trust sectors that will interest investors looking to hold their full £5,000 PEP allowance in a fund which buys UK or European equities. Most index tracking unit trusts are in the UK growth and income sector.

The benefit of dividing unit and investment trusts into sectors is that you can compare like with like when it comes to choosing a fund.

Two factors which are above anything else when it comes to making a decision on which fund to choose are charges and performance, with the latter being the most crucial.

All financial advisers and investment professionals warn investors that past performance is not necessarily a guide to the future. But that does not mean that you shouldn't

study past performance. The key is to know what to look for. Most managers can point to at least one period when they did particularly well, however short, and they'll obviously do this in their advertising material. What you should be looking for is consistently good, long-term performance figures, five years or more.

In addition, Jonathan Fry, of Guildford-based adviser and investment manager Premier Fund Managers, says: "Rather than simply looking at a snapshot of five-year performance, we like to look for funds which have produced top quartile performance over the past one, three and five years".

Equally though, when you have identified funds with the top past performance records, don't presume that the run of success will inevitably continue. Among the tests you should carry out, enquire whether the fund manager responsible for past successes is still with the company. Many top performers rely on the stock picking abilities of individual managers rather than employing a team investment approach.

Also, watch out for funds that have got significantly larger in a short space of time. A sudden influx of large amounts of new money can of-

ten prevent a manager from doing as well as he has previously. It can take time to research and invest in good quality stocks and shares.

Clearly, charges are important. Every penny you pay in fees to a PEP manager is a penny not being invested on your behalf, as we explain elsewhere. If you're asked to pay an initial charge of more than 5 per cent of your investment, or an annual charge of over 1.5 per cent, ask the provider why.

Charges are particularly important with index-tracking funds. Here performance isn't an issue as long as the manager gets tracking right. The fund moves up and down in line with the market index which it is designed to follow.

The good news is that most of the index trackers have very low charges. The cheapest, the trackers run by Legal & General, Dresdner, M&G, Fidelity and River & Mercantile, all levy no initial fee and an annual charge of less than 1 per cent.

There are certain funds that do stand out. In the unit trust market these include Newton Foundation, Perpetual Income, Schroder UK Equity (all in the UK growth and income unit trust sector), Schroder UK Enterprise (UK equity growth), GT Income, Morgan Grenfell Equity In-

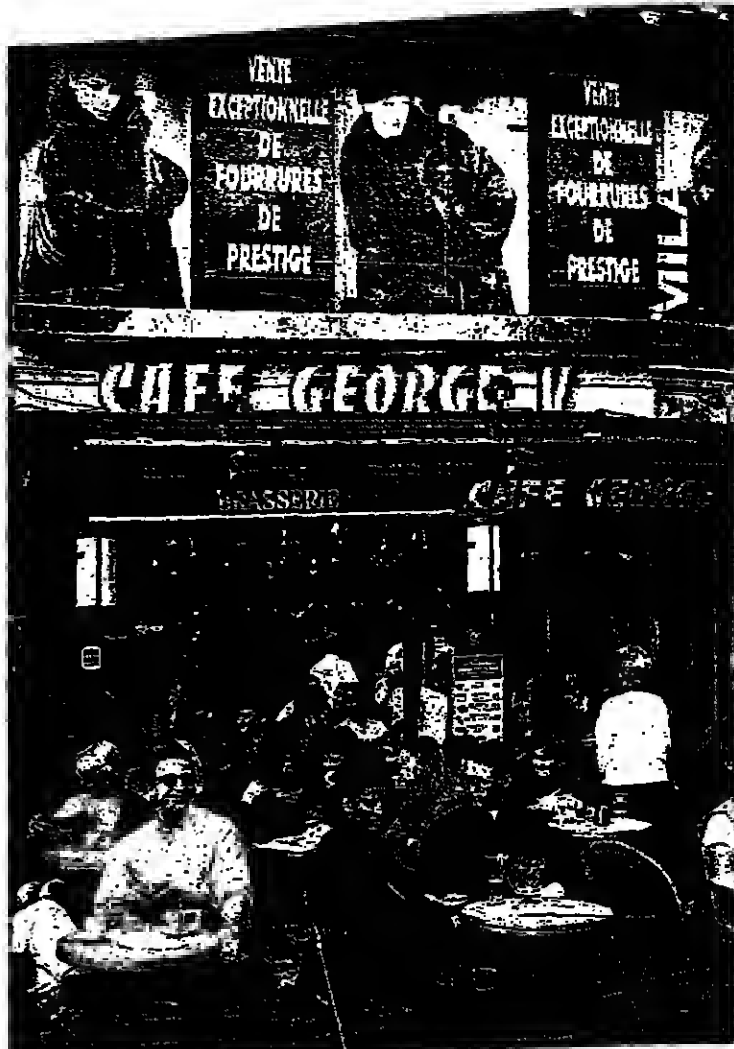
come (both UK equity income). Gartmore UK Smaller Companies (UK smaller companies) and Jupiter European (Europe).

Good performing investment trust PEPs include Fleming Claverhouse (UK general), Fleming Enterprise, Schroder UK Growth (UK capital growth), Henderson's TR European Growth, Gartmore European Growth (Europe) and Gartmore Smaller Companies (smaller companies).

Picking investment trusts, however, is a little more complicated than finding the best unit trusts. Investment trusts' share prices often trade at a discount to the value of the investments they hold, that is they are below net asset value, making this an additional factor to consider when picking funds.

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David Prosser is features editor of 'Investors Chronicle'



Foreign potential: you can invest in European trusts, too
Photograph: Geraint Lewis

Should you PEP up your portfolio before ISAs arrive?

As the Individual Savings Account looms next year, Dido Sandler considers whether PEPs are still worth investing in for another 12 months

WHILE BOTH PEPs and Tessas, a tax-free deposit account, shelter your funds from income tax, PEPs also protect investments from capital gains tax (CGT). But the Government wants to attract additional raft of new savers and investors and will soon be launching the Individual Savings Account (ISA) as the new savings vehicle in

succession to the two current schemes.

From April 1999, the ISA will allow £5,000 of investments a year per individual, £1,000 of which may be made up of savings deposits and a further £1,000 of life assurance. Certain National Savings accounts may also be included.

If current proposals get the go-ahead, existing PEP in-

vestors will be able to transfer funds over to ISAs, and thus preserve their exemption from tax, but with an upper limit of £50,000.

Holders of Tessas will be able fully to fund their accounts and keep them through to the end of the five-year term, if the account is started before April 1999. The capital from maturing Tessas may be

switched into the ISA if the account's total capital remains within the overall £50,000 limit.

The relatively low limit for PEP transfers has provoked uproar among the investment community. Clive Scott-Hopkins, director of independent financial advisers Towry Law Financial Services, accuses the Government of "unfair retrospective legislation".

Many blame the Treasury for punishing those who have been thrifty over the years, having the foresight to build up a sizeable tax-free nest egg. The Treasury believes 200,000 to 300,000 will be caught by the ISA cap on the maximum transfer. But Mr Scott-Hopkins says: "By the April 1999 the number could be imposed by PEP managers for market continues its upwards drive. The FTSE 100 has risen by some 12 per cent since the beginning of the year."

The Treasury has been subject to intense lobbying by financial trade associations and PEP providers to lift both the upper transfer limit and the lifetime cap of £50,000 on capital that any individual can put into ISAs. We will not know if the Government will take note of this until the Budget on 17 March, when the Chancellor, Gordon Brown, is expected to confirm details of the ISA rules.

Anyone with investments significantly below the £50,000 limit should probably go ahead and continue to use their annual PEP allowance, as they have little to fear from the introduction of the ISA. Before parting with your money, you should, however, check with your PEP manager to see if they are planning to levy any charges for transfer from PEPs to ISAs next year.

Most of the leading management groups such as Fidelity and M&G will make no charge for this.

"Individuals near or above the £50,000 level with their existing PEP portfolio may want to wait until after the Budget before deciding whether to use up their this year's allowance," says Mr Scott-Hopkins. "There will be a window of opportunity between 18 March and 5 April, the end of the tax year, to purchase a PEP if they wish."

If the proposed limit does not change, he advises that lower-rate taxpayers may not find it so attractive to buy PEPs as opposed to other investments. Most investment trusts and a number of unit trusts have lower annual charges than those imposed by PEP managers for running their schemes.

But Paul Boni, investment director of independent financial advisers Berry Birch & Noble, says: "Whatever the outcome of the Chancellor's deliberations for individuals with sizeable PEP holdings, they should ensure they buy their 1997/98 quota. PEPs' capital gains tax-exemption may become more valuable, post-Budget, and PEPs can often be cheaper than the unit trusts that underlie them."

Many of the large PEP providers have initial charges of around 3 per cent, compared with 5 per cent if people invest straight into underlying unit trusts. If the worst comes to the worst, and Gordon Brown is intransigent on the £50,000 transfer sum, one strategy would be to keep income stocks within the ISA, with any growth stocks outside the account.

This would be sensible because 99 per cent of the population have no CGT liability.

And those with CGT to pay may be able to "bed-and-breakfast" their holdings, that is to sell and buy them back within the tax year, thereby diminishing their tax liability. Any such moves would depend on the post-March CGT rules. This strategy could be stymied if, for example, the Government dropped the individual allowance CGT allowance from the current £6,500, below which individuals pay no tax.

Meanwhile, PEP providers, worried that the uncertainty over the investment vehicle's future will put off investors, are trying to make products as attractive as they possibly can. Royal & Sun Alliance, Gartmore, Perpetual and a number of others, have announced special discount offers to anyone taking out a PEP with them before the end of the tax year. Others, including Legal & General and Schroders, are stating that they will probably join them.

Many firms are guaranteeing existing customers that not only will they be able to convert their PEPs to ISAs free of charge, but if the £50,000 limit is retained, they will also strip the PEP wrapper off unit trusts or investment trusts for free. In other words, they will not impose any exit charge if the PEP is unwound rather than being transferred.

Berry Birch & Noble 01905 775333; Gartmore 0800 289336; Fidelity 0800 414171; Legal & General 0500 116622; M&G 01245 390390; Perpetual 01491 416123; Royal & Sun Alliance 0500 111333; Towry Law 0345 868244.

Dido Sandler writes for 'Financial Adviser'

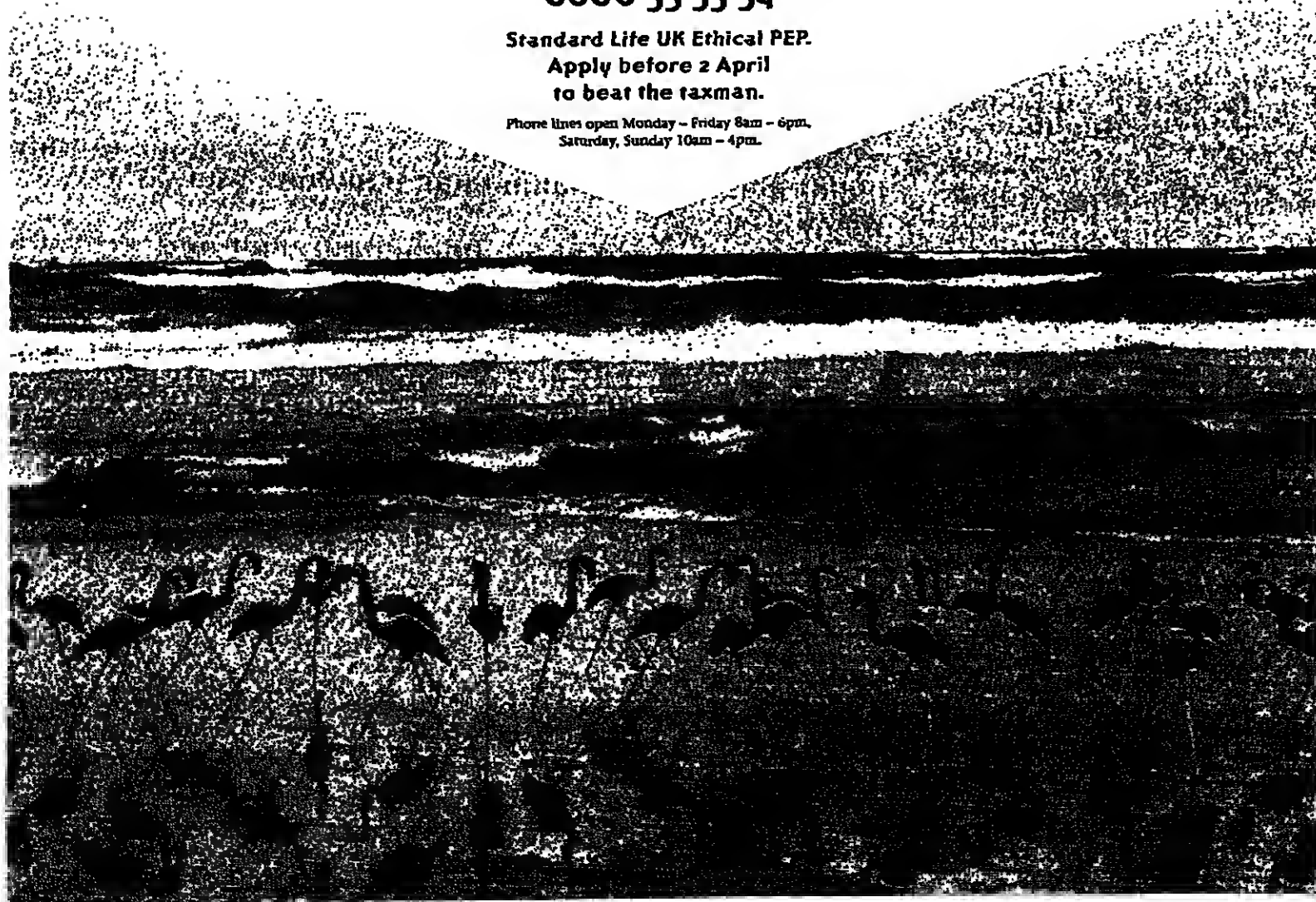
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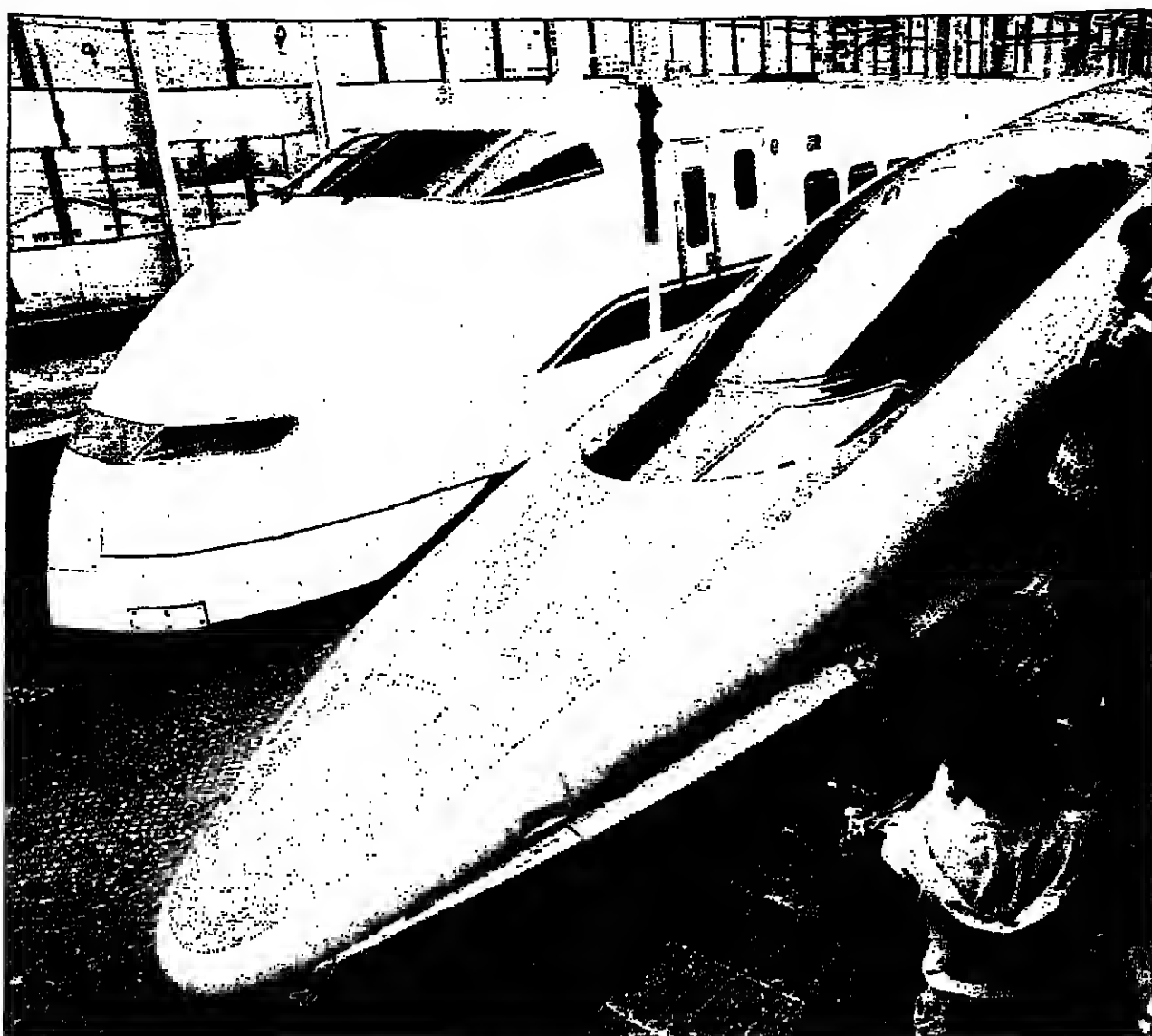
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Look to diversify: If you want to invest in Japanese markets take a long-term view

Juliet Oxborrow is editor of 'What PEP' magazine

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Share in the benefits of collective share ownership

One lasting legacy of PEPs will have been to introduce many investors to the advantages of reducing risk by pooling their investments. Simon Read explains

NEW INVESTORS attracted by aggressive advertising from the likes of Virgin Direct and M&G have been rightly buying into unit trusts and investment trusts – but without necessarily understanding why.

The simple reason is that collective investments are less risky than direct investment in shares. This, in itself, makes them more attractive to cautious investors.

Additionally, because the funds are run by professional fund managers, they allow individuals with little cash to get access to the kind of investment expertise which they wouldn't normally be able to afford.

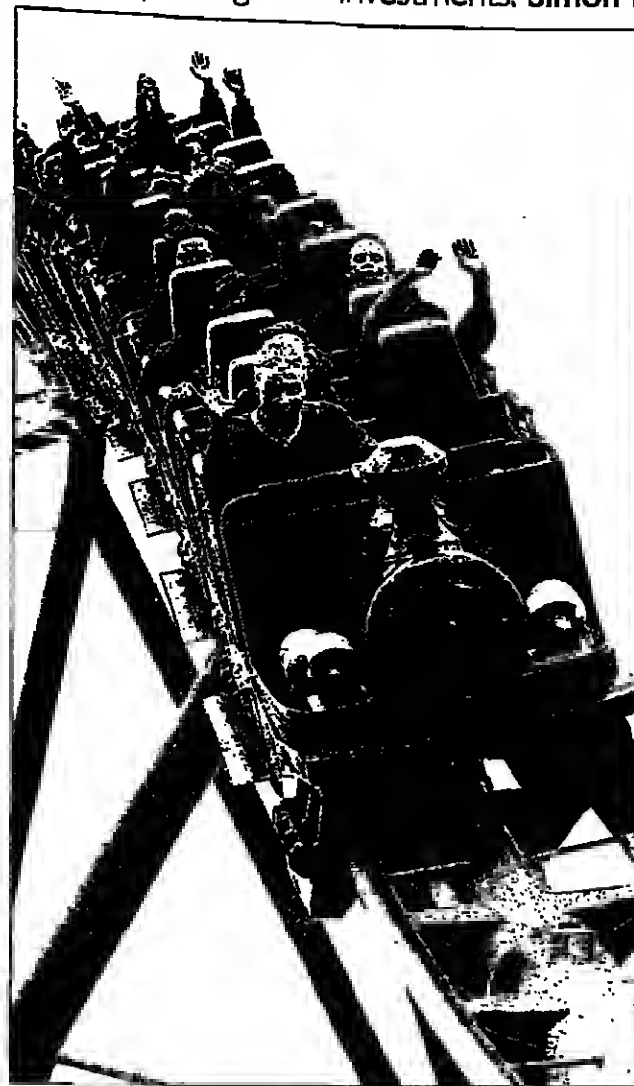
Today, there are three different types of collective investment: unit trusts, investment trusts and open-ended investment companies – more commonly known as OEICs. They all offer the chance to spread the inherent risks involved in the stock market by investing in a sizeable bundle of different companies' shares, rather than just one.

All these collective investments reduce the risk by pooling several investors' cash to create large sums that can then be invested in a range of different shares. Then if one share drops in price it should have a limited effect on the rest of the portfolio, so that the overall value of the fund remains pretty solid.

Unit trusts, investment trusts and OEICs are slightly different types of collective investment, each with its own advantages.

A unit trust is a fund split into equal units which can be bought and sold. The price of a unit fluctuates as it is directly linked to the value of the fund: if the fund is performing well, the unit price will be higher, and vice versa. The more investors there are in a unit trust, the more units can be created.

There are 22 categories of unit trust with around 1,700 funds. "It's the easiest way to invest in the stock market,



Diversified risk: Unit trusts can help small investors ride the markets' ups and downs

especially if you're new to the equities game," says Emma Weiss of the Association of Unit Trusts and Investment Funds (AUTIF). "It's convenient, and cost-effective, and leaves the investment decisions to the professionals, who have the time and expertise to make your money work for you."

An investment trust is a company in which anyone can buy and sell shares. The cash raised from the sale of shares is in effect used to invest in other companies. There are now 335

investment trust companies in the UK grouped in 24 different sectors but growth seekers have their own UK and international sectors.

However, unlike unit trusts, investment trust share prices are not directly linked to the underlying performance of the investment portfolio. As with any equity, supply and demand will have a large influence on the share price as will the overall stock market sentiment: although, if the investment trust is performing well that will obviously be reflected in the

popularity of its shares.

"Generally, investment trusts have a far better record of growth than any other collective form of investment over the long term and they have the advantage of low management charges," says Andrew Barker, chairman of the Association of Investment Trust Companies (AITC). "They are also quoted on the stock market, which means you can easily buy and sell their shares."

The OEIC only arrived on the UK investment scene last year and is a cross between its two older cousins. OEICs offer shares like investment trusts but are open-ended like unit trusts. This means that they can alter the number of shares they issue to match demand.

Consequently, their share price is based directly on the value of the fund, rather than bending with market sentiment as can happen with investment trusts.

OEICs are seen as the future of collective investment as they are reckoned to be more flexible and simpler to understand than either of their rival types of collective funds. However, few investment houses have taken up the OEIC challenge to date.

Not all unit trusts, investment trusts and OEICs are allowed to be put into a personal equity plan to get tax advantages. Qualifying trusts must have at least 50 per cent of their funds invested in UK or EU quoted shares, bonds or convertibles. If you pick a non-qualifying trust, which must be invested in a stock market recognised by the Inland Revenue, you'll only be able to invest up to £1,500 in a PEP, rather than the £6,000 in a qualifying fund.

Contact AUTIF (0171-331 0398) for more information about investing in unit trusts and OEICs and the AITC (0171-431 5222) for information about investment trust companies.

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Manek Growth Fund and PEP

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* Source: Mifcor Ltd, buying price to selling price from 1.3.91 - 26.1.98, the UK Stockmarket Fund grew by 146.39% with income re-invested (an annualised growth rate of 13.94%).

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Savings that don't lose their PEP

When considering investing in a PEP, it's easy to forget about charges. But, as Simon Read explains, this could be a costly mistake

CHARGES levied by PEP managers can make a real difference to your eventual gains. In fact, if the charges are too high, it could mean that your investment may never return its original value. If that sounds far-fetched, then consider that many PEP managers have initial charges as high as 5 per cent. This means £300 lost from a £6,000 investment.

If shares go through a dull patch, it could take some time for your investment to regain its original worth. In effect it needs to grow by 5 per cent to recover, and that's before considering any administration charges.

The main factor when deciding on a PEP should be your view of its likely performance. But charges are also important.

Now, more than ever, charges are to the fore. The weeks up to the end of the tax year on 5 April are the most popular time for buying PEPs, as people try to make the most of their allowances before the opportunity disappears. Accordingly, managers are offering discounts and special offers.

Nat West, for instance, has halved initial charges on eight of its unit trust PEPs. This could mean a saving of between £118 and £153.

Wesleyan Financial Services, a life insurer which has expanded into PEPs, has also slashed initial charges on its Wesleyan Growth unit trust from 4 to 3 per cent. The company levies a 1.5 per cent annual management charge on its product, which ranked 64th out of 136 funds in its sector in the year to February.

Foreign & Colonial is offering two for the price of one for those who take out an investment trust PEP with the group before the end of the tax year, and then another in the 1998/99 tax year. The £50 initial charge on the second will be waived.

Fidelity, like many other managers, has chosen to go the discount route by offering 1 per cent off the initial charge on its investment trust PEP range.

There are plenty of other offers, and many low-cost PEP managers simply point out that they have no initial charges. Companies such as Legal & General,

Virgin Direct and Fidelity have done away with up-front charges in the last two years. This has been highly successful; these companies have attracted much of the new PEP business, especially as many others still make an initial charge up to 5 per cent.

The low-cost providers have also pared annual management charges to the bone. Virgin Direct and Fidelity charge just 0.7 per cent a year, while Legal & General charges just 0.5 per cent. Most PEP managers make an annual charge of around 1.5 per cent.

The savings can be considerable if you choose a low-cost PEP. But there is a downside? Well, yes. The reason that companies such as Virgin Direct and Legal & General can afford to slash charges is because they've cut back on costs by cutting out fund management altogether.

Instead, they rely on funds that replicate average market performance. They do this by using tracker funds that simply buy all, or a representative sample, of the shares in a particular index, such as the FT-SE 100 or the All Share index. Many PEP managers have followed this route of no initial charges.

The average annual management charge for a PEP now stands at around 1.5 per cent. If any one is markedly more expensive than this, you should only really consider buying into their PEP if you think they can offer remarkably better investment returns than anyone else.

Also when looking at PEPs, check to see whether there are any

exit charges. Some PEP managers cut their initial charges, only to slyly introduce exit charges. These penalise you if you take your cash out of their investment. M&G for instance is guilty of charging 4.5 per cent if you cash your PEP in before the year is out, although its charges drop year by year. Legal & General charges 5 per cent. Others simply charge a lump sum - Henderson, for example, charges £20.

One final point to watch out for is the bid/offer spread, the difference between the cost of buying and selling a PEP. For example, Royal & Sun Alliance is offering a low-cost tracker PEP with no initial charges and an annual management fee of just 0.3 per cent. But its bid/offer spread is 5.5 per cent, which negates the price advantage on offer, compared to Legal & General, at least.

One way to cut the impact of charges is to buy your PEP through a discount shop. All advisers earn commission from the PEP provider every time they sell a plan. In order to offer a discount, the brokers have been splitting the commission with customers, which significantly brings down the charges.

The Independent has published a free 'Guide to Making Your Investments Work for You'. The guide, by Steve Lodge, personal finance editor on 'The Independent on Sunday', is sponsored by Wesleyan Financial Services. It is available by calling 0800 1379749. Or fill in the coupon on page 12.



Pay day: make your PEP work for you instead

Photograph: Hulton Deitch

How to yield an income

Tony Lyons and Simon Read discuss one of the other key advantages of PEPs - boosting income

THE chief merit of PEPs is that any income your plan generates is free of all income tax. You therefore earn more than you might obtain from high street bank and building society deposit accounts, albeit with some risk.

If you have a self-select PEP you can go for companies that pay out high dividends. But watch out. High yield is by definition high risk.

If like most investors you opt for a general PEP and have your money managed professionally, you can look at high-yielding unit and investment trusts. But these days, most do not offer that high a yield. M&G Extra Income, one of the more popular high income unit trusts, currently yields under 4.5 per cent. This means that for every £100 invested, you can expect less than £4.50 in income.

But don't despair. Since July 1995, corporate bond PEPs have been available. There are now some 60 different ones on offer and most of them currently yield around 7 per cent or more.

Corporate bond PEPs, not to be confused with corporate PEPs which invest in a company's ordinary shares, are often seen as safer investments than conventional plans.

They are lower risk because they invest in fixed-interest bonds and other securities issued by companies. But at the end of the day, the stock is only as good as the company that issues it. You would be right if you expected the yield on Marks & Spencer or BP to be lower than that of a small engineering company. The risk with a corporate bond portfolio is dependent on the mix of

different types of stock. The yield the PEP offers depends on the fund manager's strategy.

What they will all have in common is that they are set up to generate income. In effect they are fixed-interest bonds issued by companies to raise money. Investors are therefore lending a company money for a fixed time and receiving interest on the loan.

Convertibles are similar vehicles in that, like corporate bonds, they offer a fixed rate of interest, but also offer investors the chance to convert their option into shares. For that reason they offer lower returns than corporate bonds, but do have the extra potential of enjoying the capital growth associated with equities. Convertibles have therefore often been promoted as a relatively low-risk entry into the equity market.

When comparing yields it's worth bearing in mind two things, the risks and the charges. There are often two yields quoted on corporate bond PEPs, the "running yield" and the "gross redemption yield".

The first relates to the current estimated level of income you'll get, but this can be misleading because it takes no account of

any capital gains or losses.

The notion of capital rising or falling in this type of investment may seem confusing, but that's because while there may be fixed interest on offer, there is no guarantee on the capital. Bond prices go up and down according to the prevailing market conditions. The timing of buying and selling can affect the return. So don't be fooled by advertisements of "guaranteed" income or yield, which hide the fact that your capital may be at risk.

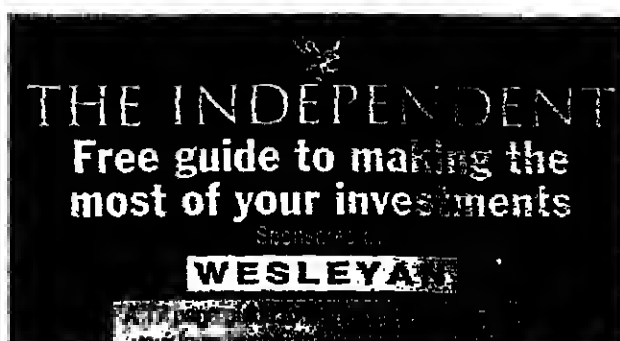
Gross redemption yield in fact gives a better indication of the return on your investment in a corporate bond PEP as it takes into account gains or losses on capital, as well as income.

How should you choose a corporate bond PEP? Obviously the yield is important but you should also take into account charges. High charges will erode your capital quite quickly whereas in an equity-linked PEP, the growth should offset this.

Some managers still make an initial charge of up to 5 per cent. The annual charge is important as you will have to pay it each year. This ranges between 0.5 and 1.25 per cent, with most being under 1 per cent.

But watch out. Some managers boost the income generated by their fund at the expense of investors' capital. They can do this by taking their management charges out of capital rather than out of income generated.

As corporate bonds will only give modest capital gains, if any, when compared with ordinary shares, this way of taking out annual charges can erode capital.



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